

# The Myth of Anti-Catholicism: A Defense of The Boston Globe

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**The Myth of Anti-Catholicism:**

**A Defense of *The Boston Globe***

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## Abstract

*The Boston Globe* has had an unfair reputation as an anti-Catholic newspaper since the 1970s, but the claim surfaced with new vigor in response to the newspaper's coverage of the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church in 2002. The accusations stems from three misconceptions: (1) that the *Globe* is a remnant of Protestant power in Boston ; (2) that the *Globe* seeks to antagonize the Catholic Church with its liberal social positions; and (3) that the *Globe* intentionally sensationalized its coverage in 2002 and essentially mounted a media attack on a defenseless archdiocese.

The idea that the *Globe* holds a longstanding gripe against the Catholic Church is completely false. Through a historical account of anti-Catholicism and journalism in Boston and an analysis of the *Globe's* 2002 coverage, this work shows that (1) the *Globe* was the first Boston paper to appeal to the interests of the Irish Catholic population and has maintained a consistent policy of fairness since the 1870s; (2) the *Globe's* liberal editorial stances are formed without consideration for Church positions; and (3) the coverage of the sex abuse scandal in 2002 was the product of fair and balanced reporting, with the antagonism originating from the archdiocese.

## Introduction

The primary purpose of newspapers is to inform the public. At the macro level, their readers are the citizens who read the paper every day; at the micro level, their readers are historians and scholars who understand the unmatched importance of newspapers as primary sources. In the early years of this nation, dozens of publications were printed for the sole purpose of spreading anti-Catholic propaganda. A survey of colonial or 19th-century newspapers reveals a strong and persistent anti-Catholic undertone. In many ways, the print media were the means through which this prejudice grew so potent.

In recent decades, critics have tagged *The Boston Globe* as a newspaper with an ingrained bias against the Catholic Church. The basis for this accusation is essentially abstract. The *Globe* has never run any blatantly anti-Catholic editorials comparing the pope to Satan, as was customary for many publications in the 1850s. Rather, critics point to the paper's liberal positions, which run counter to those of the Church, and its aggressive coverage of the 2002 priest sex abuse scandal. Indeed, the past two years have been rife with casual remarks about the *Globe's* anti-Catholic agenda, and most of these groundless accusations have gone unchallenged.

This work seeks to mount that challenge. It will explore the history of the Catholic experience in the Boston area in an effort to contextualize the defensive nature of the Church. It will look at the *Globe's* coverage from its inception in 1872 to the present, with a particular focus on its treatment of the 2002 priest sex abuse scandal.

The following pages offer a defense of the *Boston Globe*. As the anti-Catholic myth dissolves, it will become clear that the real problem is the Church's own efforts to cling to its power, both real and mythical.

## Chapter One

### TURNING POINT

“The papers like to focus on the faults of a few. We deplore that. By all means, we call down God’s power on the media, particularly the *Globe*.”

—*Bernard Cardinal Law, May 1992*

“We’ve hung in there. The *Globe*’s been fine since then.”

—*Stephen Kurkjian, Globe Spotlight Team, October 2002*

The relationship between *The Boston Globe* and sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church began in the summer of 2001. Lawyers for the Archdiocese of Boston submitted a legal response to the Suffolk Superior Court in the case against Revered John Geoghan. It was in this routine document that Bernard Cardinal Law admitted to reassigning Geoghan in 1984 with knowledge that he had molested seven boys. There was no formal announcement, public admission, letter from the cardinal in *The Pilot*, the archdiocesan newspaper, to inform the faithful of problems in their Church. There was no heated witness-stand admission, no outpouring of victims' stories, and certainly no conscious digging by *Globe* reporters to find anything more than a single degenerate priest on trial.

*Globe* reporters refer to that court filing as a "turning point"<sup>1</sup> in their coverage of the Geoghan trial. The story of a cardinal who protected a criminal priest essentially fell right into the hands of the media. During the summer of 2001, a group of responsible journalists did some old-fashioned legwork and began to see the forest through the trees. The Geoghan trial was no isolated event; Law had protected him and several other priests. There is no better word than cover-up to describe what the *Globe* Spotlight Team unearthed.

The investigative reporters of the Spotlight Team are described here as "responsible" because they did exactly what their profession empowers them to do. *Globe* editor-in-chief Martin Baron, who assumed his post in late July 2001, questioned whether Law's treatment of Geoghan hinted at an institutional pattern – a question saturated with relevance to the public's interest and welfare. In simple terms, newspapers answer questions, and reporters work the story until the answer is found and neatly

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<sup>1</sup> The Boston Globe Spotlight Team, *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church* (Little, Brown, and Company. Boston, MA: 2002) ix.

bundled into column inches. The issue may be as basic as “what happened today?” or, as in the case of the Church scandal, the reporting goes far beyond a simple cataloguing of events and quotes.

Passionate journalists hunger for such a story, not because of its content, but because of its awesome impact. As Spotlight Team editor Walter V. Robinson says, “For us as reporters, this was never a high-fiver. It was painful for all reporters no matter what their background. It’s just a terrible subject.”<sup>2</sup> Today’s cynical society tends to believe that reporters gleefully feed off such stories, but real journalists gain motivation from a clear understanding of their role in society. The basic desire to know will propel them through hours of interviews and endless stacks of files until paper cuts cover their hands. It will drive them through 10,000 pages of Church documents until the text begins to blur. At all costs, the story will make deadline. Journalists labor under an unwritten covenant with the public, and for the true believers, this sacred creed keeps them going. The members of the Spotlight Team –Robinson, Sacha Pfeiffer, Michael Rezendes, Matt Carroll – special projects reporters Stephen Kurkjian, Thomas Farragher, and Kevin Cullen, and religion reporter Michael Paulson are all true believers.

The Spotlight Team moved to act on the inquiry by their editor, but they had little to work with. Besides the individuals involved in the litigation, they had no other names of victims or priests, accused or otherwise. They made calls to victims’ groups and people familiar with the case, including attorneys. “After three or four days, we didn’t find out much about Geoghan,” Robinson told an audience gathered at a media panel at Boston College in October 2002. “But we were pretty surprised. We went back to our

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<sup>2</sup> Walter V. Robinson, personal interview, 11 March 2004.



editors and told them that Geoghan appeared to be the tip of an iceberg of an undetermined size.”<sup>3</sup>

The reporters had learned that over an uncertain period of time, the archdiocese had settled an unknown number of cases involving priests – and all outside the walls of any courthouse. They knew that several people had approached the archdiocese without attorneys, but there was no way to contact them. The journalists embarked on a painstaking analysis of the Boston archdiocese’s official directories, which list all priests and are published annually. They compiled a database of priests who had been listed as unassigned or on sick leave from 1984 to 2002.

The final analysis proved very telling: from 1984 to 1991, an average of 20 priests had been listed as on leave for various reasons each year. After the sex abuse case in Fall River, Mass., involving James Porter in 1992, the number in Boston spiked to a yearly average of 100 priests and stayed that high for several years. Of course, the database contained names of perfectly innocent priests who had legitimate reasons for taking leave.

The next step for the *Globe* team was to obtain case files from the courts, but they lacked docket numbers and names for the litigation parties. The reporters searched court records by using the names of attorneys known to have worked on these cases, and received more than 1,000 case files. This second step also proved very telling: When the reporters plugged the docket numbers into the courts’ online system, no information was available. The *Globe*’s attorneys learned that these cases had been sealed by court order.

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<sup>3</sup> The Boston Globe Spotlight Team, “Spotlight on Scandal: How the Boston Globe Broke the Story and Covered the Sexual Abuse Crisis,” The Church in the 21st Century Initiative, Robsham Theater, Boston College. 23 Oct. 2002.

Under ordinary circumstances, all documents turned over as evidence become part of the public record. In the sex abuse cases involving the Church, judges had sealed all these records, including depositions and Geoghan's personnel records. Baron suggested that the *Globe* challenge the court orders, and the newspaper filed a motion in August 2001 asking that these files be made public as a matter of public interest.

Superior Court Judge Constance Sweeney ruled in the *Globe*'s favor in November, and the archdiocese appealed the decision. In the meantime, the Spotlight Team continued to talk with attorneys, plaintiffs, and priests who had known Geoghan. They continued to sift through what documents were available and came across an incredible find. The attached exhibits included references to, and excerpts from, the confidential documents. These excerpts included a letter to Humberto Cardinal Medeiros, Law's predecessor, and a letter to Bishop John D'Arcy, both written by mothers of children who had been abused by Geoghan. They told of the priest's abuse and warned that he should not be reassigned.

"We realized that by piecing it all together, we didn't just have a story of a serial pedophile priest," said Michael Rezendes at the media panel, "we had a story that showed that all of the significant people who supervised this priest knew. Cardinal Law and his top bishops knew."

The state appeals court upheld Sweeney's order in December, setting a release date for the documents in January 2002. On December 17, Law's attorneys sent the *Globe* a letter that warned of legal sanctions if the newspaper published anything obtained from confidential files. But the Spotlight Team had been investigating this issue for months without these documents, and they had learned that several priests in the

archdiocese had faced allegations of sexual abuse, which ended with confidentiality agreements between the Church and the victims and their attorneys. In essence, the victims and their families signed themselves to secrecy, and put their settlement money at risk if they talked about the matter. This was credible evidence of a large-scale cover-up. The *Globe* had Geoghan's psychiatric records, obtained through court order, and the files included correspondence between Law and top officials that was sympathetic to Geoghan. The records revealed that Church officials had attempted to influence medical diagnoses. The team investigated the backgrounds of the two psychiatrists who had cleared Geoghan for parish work. One had been accused of molestation by two of his patients; the other was a Geoghan family friend with no experience in treating pedophiles.

The *Globe* had victim accounts, attorney quotes, letters between Church officials about Geoghan's abuse, and, most significantly, the ultimate rebuttal to Law's defense was undercut. The cardinal had known about Geoghan's history of abuse, had relied on psychiatric advice from dubious sources, and had assigned him again and again. The *Globe* had enough for a story, a big story.

On January 6, 2002, *The Sunday Globe* ran a front-page banner headline, "Church allowed abuse by priests for years," with the above-the-fold story, which jumped to two facing pages at the end of the A section. The story package included photos of Law and five bishops who knew of the abuse, an insert of a portion of a hand-written letter from a victim's relative, and a victim shot with an accompanying display quote: "To find out later that the Church knew he was a child molester – every day it bothers me more and

more.” But readers didn’t have to move beyond the impressive 300 words on Page One to know that the Church in Boston had a scandal on its hands.

“Since the mid-1990s, more than 130 people have come forward with horrific childhood tales about how former priest John J. Geoghan allegedly fondled or raped them during a three-decade spree through a half-dozen Greater Boston parishes.

Almost always, his victims were grammar school boys. One was just 4 years old.

Then came last July’s disclosure that Cardinal Bernard F. Law knew about Geoghan’s problems in 1984, Law’s first year in Boston, yet approved his transfer to St. Julia’s parish in Weston. Wilson D. Rogers Jr., the cardinal’s attorney, defended the move last summer, saying the archdiocese had medical assurances that each Geoghan reassignment was ‘appropriate and safe.’

But one of Law’s bishops thought that the 1984 assignment of Geoghan to St. Julia’s was so risky, he wrote the cardinal a letter in protest. And for good reason, the Spotlight Team found: The archdiocese already had substantial evidence of Geoghan’s predatory sexual habits. That included his assertion in 1980 that his repeated abuse of s even boys in one extended family was not a ‘serious’ problem, according to an archdiocesan record.

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Now, as Geoghan faces the first of two criminal trials next week, details about his sexual compulsion are likely to be overshadowed by a question that many Catholics find even more troubling: Why did it take a succession of three cardinals and many bishops 34 years to place children out of Geoghan’s reach?<sup>4</sup>

Here, in their very first story, the Spotlight Team’s members assigned themselves a new question to answer: Why? That probe would mean doubling the team’s personnel from four to eight, bring them tens of thousands of pages of Church documents and non-stop phone calls to their office, and cause them produce a few hundred articles in 2002. And it earned the team a Pulitzer Prize in April 2003.

This first story catalyzed an unprecedented degree of questioning among clergy, laity, and theologians. Catholics questioned their faith, the disproportionate roles of the laity and hierarchy, and even specific areas of Church doctrine, such as clerical celibacy.

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<sup>4</sup> The Boston Globe Spotlight Team, “Church allowed abuse by priest for years,” *The Boston Globe* 6 Jan. 2002: A1.

The year 2002 produced dozens of books and hundreds of articles on the crisis, and it saw the formation of organized groups for victims, priests, and concerned laymen and women. That first *Globe* story on January 6 stirred movement and discussion across the nation, but the coverage did not garner praise from all corners.

At the media panel during which many Spotlight Team members spoke, a man from the audience, identifying himself as a defender of the Catholic Church for 20 years, accused the newspaper of anti-Catholicism. “It is without a doubt that you have had a proven history at the *Globe* of anti-Catholic rhetoric,” he said. “The *Globe* has beaten the drum, the tom-tom, and others have jumped on board so that the cardinal had to be abused by talk show hosts in front of his residence ... There is no meddling with Jews and Muslims so far...”

*Globe* reporter Stephen A. Kurkjian interrupted the speaker with a heated response: “That’s outrageous, sir! Outrageous! Don’t ask us to balance the abuse that went on here by looking at other institutions. There is no reason to fill this hall tonight with what sounds like hate rhetoric.”

Scores of clergy, Catholics, scholars, and journalists have accused the *Globe* of anti-Catholicism. This speaker was only one in a million who view the Church’s role in the scandal as that of the victim. Many writers have used the term “Ground Zero” to refer to the Boston archdiocese in the crisis that has spread throughout the American Catholic Church from the northeast “epicenter,” another frequently overused word. This loaded imagery suggests that the Boston archdiocese fell under hostile attack with little or no warning, and no defense. Many see the media’s coverage of the scandal – in particular, that of the *Globe* – as the journalistic work of Satan himself. They maintain that the

*Globe* and its reporters hold a historical grudge against the Church establishment in Boston, and so they manipulated and sensationalized their coverage simply for the satisfaction of bringing down a hated religious institution.

But there lies the rub: the Catholic Church is both a religious establishment and an influential institution. This dichotomy fuels arguments both in defense and support of the newspaper. In their book *The Elements of Journalism*, Bill Kovach and Thomas Rosenstiel note that “Journalists like to think of themselves as the people’s surrogate, covering society’s waterfront in the public interest. People see sensationalism, exploitation, and they sense journalists are in it for a buck, or personal fame, or, worse, a kind of perverse joy in unhappiness.”<sup>5</sup> In this modern age of skepticism, journalists can no longer expect the faith of the public; the burden is on them to prove themselves worthy of trust. The excellence of the *Globe* Spotlight Team’s reporting throughout the sex abuse scandal should have accomplished just that – earned recognition for fair, thorough, and reliable reporting. But as soon as the first few stories rolled off the presses, critics were already making impassioned accusations about the *Globe*’s anti-Catholic agenda. This response seemed more automatic than substantial.

One commentator introduced his essay on the scandal with a rather casual strike to the paper:

“If the scandal caused by clerical sex abuse eventually leads to reform and renewal in the Catholic Church in America, as I hope and pray it will, then history will record that the Catholic restoration was sparked, ironically enough, by the *Boston Globe* – a newspaper with a long history of hostility toward the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bill Kovach and Thomas Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. (Crown Publishers. New York, NY: 2001) 68.

<sup>6</sup> Philip F. Lawler, “Priestly Misconduct, Episcopal Neglect: An Overview of the Scandals,” *Shaken by Scandals: Catholics speak out about priests and sexual abuse*, Edited by Paul Thigpen (Servant Publications. Ann Arbor, MI: 2002) 21.

A Franciscan friar writing in defense of the Church made a similar, though more venomous, remark:

“Suppose a Catholic priest killed someone. Would you hear about it? Did you ever hear about these ministers? If they had been priests, you would have heard about it on the front page, day after day. The *Boston Globe* published scores of articles on its front page on the subject of James Porter, who had been dismissed years earlier from the priesthood. The *Globe* insisted on continually calling him ‘Father.’ The *Boston Globe* has probably the longest history of anti-Catholicism of any newspaper in the United States.”<sup>7</sup>

The implication is as clear as day: the *Globe*’s predetermined bias motivated its editors and reporters to treat this story differently from all others. The desire for vengeance – not editorial instinct – motivated editors to overplay the story, give it unwarranted Page-One attention, or, even worse, produce deliberately unbalanced stories. There are many media critics who must imagine Baron and Robinson scheming together in the newsroom while stroking their mustaches and polishing their horns. In fact, this particular friar suggests just that: “I’m sure that most of those behind the media blitz – the feeding frenzy against the Catholic Church – have no idea that they are doing the work of Satan.”<sup>8</sup>

Although this commentary from an extreme end of the spectrum, there are plenty of people in between who characterize the *Globe* as being prejudiced against the Catholic Church. These include laymen, politicians such as former Boston mayor and Vatican ambassador Raymond Flynn, priests, and even Cardinal Law himself. Amid *Globe* coverage of the Porter sex scandal in 1992, Law stood outside of Holy Cross Cathedral and made a statement that would linger in the minds of many Boston Catholics: “By all means, we call down the power of God on the media, particularly the *Globe*.” Law’s

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<sup>7</sup> Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., *From Scandal to Hope* (Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division. Huntington, IN: 2002) 47.

<sup>8</sup> Groeschel, 58-59.

dramatic public prayer boils down to a disguised attempt at spreading propaganda. With little to no information flowing from the Church itself, people learned about the sex scandals in 1992 and 2002 from the media. The consistent response from the Church was to characterize reporters as immoral, agenda-driven attackers – and, according to Law, they were so obviously unjust that even God was aligned against them. In the so called “wake” of the most recent scandal, media critics treated the intensive coverage of 2002 as though it were a sudden, full-force assault on the Boston archdiocese and the larger Catholic Church.

A more accurate look at the timetable of events essentially negates this widely held perception. Most people are not aware that Law knew as early as August 2001 that *Globe* reporters were looking into priests other than Geoghan. In fact, he instructed a lay emissary to contact Robinson about the paper’s intentions. Robinson told the emissary that the *Globe* would contact the archdiocese if it needed to speak with the cardinal. “[The archdiocese] must’ve known by December that we had a lot of material,” said Robinson in an interview.

In the first week of December 2001, the *Globe* formally approached the archdiocese to speak with Law about Geoghan and the large number of other priests for whom there had been settlements. Robinson even offered to provide Law with the *Globe*’s questions before the interview, which is extremely rare in the profession. “Talk about deference,” says Robinson today.

The *Globe* informed the archdiocese of its intentions to run a story and asked for a Church response by January 4, 2002. In other words, the Church had four weeks to respond to the questions, draft a statement, and prepare for the story. The archdiocese did



not appreciate the extent of the *Globe*'s professional courtesy – let alone take advantage of it. Archdiocesan spokesperson Donna Morrissey told the *Globe*: “The Cardinal will not talk to you, no one will talk to you,” says Robinson. “They didn’t even want to know the questions.” Robinson raises an important question: “Where are the four paragraphs [from the archdiocese] we could’ve put on Page One defending what they did?” He says that any such statement would certainly have received front-page attention.<sup>9</sup>

This part of the story seriously undercuts seeing the Church as a victim at the hands of a preying newspaper. This more complete timetable provides a tremendous amount of illumination on the degree of communication between the archdiocese and the *Globe* – the latter of which certainly looks better. These details cannot be found in the *Globe*'s coverage or the Spotlight Team's own book, *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church*. There was no mention of them when the Spotlight Team spoke candidly about its investigation during the aforementioned media panel – even when faced with accusations of anti-Catholicism from the audience. During an interview with Robinson, he omitted this information until directly questioned about it at the end of the session. In short, the *Globe* has not exploited this information to counter media criticism and accusations of anti-Catholicism.

The coverage should speak for itself, but in many ways, the coverage is the problem. Over the past two decades, deference toward the Catholic Church has waned significantly, but many still feel that it is an institution above scrutiny. While the sex scandal itself was undeniably worthy of exposure, the harshest criticism falls on the media's reporting approach. The story received relentless attention in the daily news, and the *Globe* was not the only media outlet to designate a special team to focus on the

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<sup>9</sup> Walter V. Robinson, personal interview, 11 March 2004.

scandal. The argument over whether the degree of attention was appropriate inevitably boils down to a question of motivation.

Some scholars who have watched the sex scandal in the Boston archdiocese escalate into a nation-wide “crisis in the Church” attribute the development to the prevalence of a “new anti-Catholicism.” Religion scholar Philip Jenkins, who has written and lectured extensively on this topic, writes that “for newspapers and newsmagazines, for television news and in movies, for major book publishers, the Catholic Church has come to provide a grossly stereotyped public villain.”<sup>10</sup>

This lament has a long history. Harper’s Weekly, an American magazine of literature, politics, culture, and the arts, is among the throng of publications that have been accused of anti-Catholicism. The magazine once came under heat for running a controversial cartoon. Subtitled “The Priests and the Children,” it presented an image of worried parents shielding their children from Catholic bishops, whose mitres were depicted as the teeth of threatening crocodiles rising out of the water. But the cartoon had nothing to do with the sex abuse scandal in the Church. In fact, it appeared in the September 30, 1871 issue of Harper’s as a reaction to the rapid increase in American parochial schools. This illustration, “American River Ganges” by cartoonist Thomas Nast, no friend to the Catholic Church, appeared at the height of anti Catholic propaganda during the post-Civil War period.

Such religious prejudice is older than the United States. It traveled across the Atlantic with the first settlers from England and firmly rooted itself in the American tradition. Originally an English influence, anti-Catholic sentiment quickly took on a

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<sup>10</sup> Phillip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (Oxford University Press. New York, NY: 2003) 114.

distinctively American flair. This hybrid grew more venomous than the original, and allied itself against virtually anything considered foreign. It manifested itself in politics, economics, literature, and, perhaps most openly, the print media.

This anti-Catholic paranoia was supposed to have faded away after the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960, when the pope failed to take advantage of a Catholic president to seize power over the country. For two centuries, Protestant America had exaggerated the dangers of the “Catholic menace,” claiming that any allegiance to a foreign authority – the pope – threatened the very core of a democratic society with “un-American” ways. Ironically, the United States has developed into one of the most Catholic nations on the globe, and without any consequential changes or the much-feared papal coup d’etat. At its bicentennial, the Catholic Church in the United States had established 18,500 parishes, about 10,000 parochial schools, 245 colleges and universities, and 750 hospitals.<sup>11</sup> The Puritans, colonial Americans, and 19th-century Nativists did everything they could to discourage Catholics and keep them powerless. If these figures testify to anything, it is that the anti-Catholic set failed miserably.

The religion commentator Peter Steinfels has aptly written that the encounter between the United States and the Catholic Church is “one of the most remarkable episodes of modern history.” For two centuries, these two institutions clashed in almost every manner possible, then, Steinfels notes, “by the second half of the twentieth century ... the alignment between them seemed so extensive and so natural that the earlier discord was virtually forgotten.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Catholic Church in America* (Simon & Schuster. New York, NY: 2003) 4.

<sup>12</sup> Steinfels, 69.

Yet the sentiment behind Nast's 1871 cartoon is not history. In 2002, an Alabama newspaper ran a spoof of "American River Ganges" on its op/ed pages entitled "Shark." A bishop's mitre was again portrayed as jaws, but the contemporary artist chose a shark over crocodiles and clearly wrote "pedophilia" on the mitre.<sup>13</sup> The parody proved even more controversial than the original, adding fuel to the fire in the debate over the new anti-Catholicism.

The fact that "Ganges" and "Shark" appeared 130 years apart calls attention to the historical interaction of anti-Catholicism and the media. Any thorough discussion of the validity of the *Globe's* anti-Catholic rap in 2002 would be deficient without the proper historical background. Questions about the *Globe's* anti-Catholicism surfaced as early as the first weeks of coverage, and they were not due to any hard evidence against the newspaper. A look at the intertwined history of American anti-Catholicism and the media provides the necessary context to understand the distinctively defensive Catholic Church reaction to the priest sex abuse scandal in 2002.

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<sup>13</sup> Jenkins, p. 134.

## Chapter Two

### THE “OLD” ANTI-CATHOLICISM

“Anti-Catholicism has always been the pornography of the Puritan.”

—*Historian Richard Hofstadter*

The Puritans of Boston were not known for their tolerance of different people, and Catholics faced no competition for the top spot on the Puritans' list of abhorrent characters. They viewed the Catholic Church as inherently corrupt, hopelessly misguided, excessively ornate, and disturbingly autocratic in its hierarchy. Their glorious "City on a Hill" was to be a shining example of the benefits of biblical reform on religious and political life. If all went according to plan, the Puritans' success in Boston would inspire the elimination of all remnants of "popery" in their new homeland.

In 17th-century England, Catholics were excluded from the law profession and teaching and assessed heavy fines for failure to attend church. Priests were banished and all citizens were required an oath of allegiance to the English king. In New England, the Puritans did not need any such laws; they simply banned all Catholics instead.

The Puritans who founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s were only two or three generations removed from the religious inconsistency of the Tudor monarchs. Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1534 had instilled hope in reform-minded Englishmen who saw the need for a religious purification of church and state. Henry's Catholic daughter, Mary I, mended England's ties with Rome to the dismay of the Puritans. Her Protestant sister, Elizabeth I, took the throne next, spurring Phillip II of Spain to valiantly set out to restore Catholicism to England. For Protestants, the hated "Bloody Mary" and the failed attack by the Spanish Armada testified to the backhanded and threatening nature of Catholics.

The attempted murder of James I by English Catholics in 1605 did little to help this image. The so-called Gunpowder plot succeeded only in convincing the English that

every Catholic was a potential traitor, secretly involved in some underground Papist conspiracy. Protestants believed that Rome's degree of temporal sway throughout European history classified it as a serious foreign threat, and anti-Catholicism developed into a form of patriotism.

This extreme degree of ingrained prejudice may have endured through dubious means. One historian notes that "there is a mass of evidence to testify to British efforts to develop in the colonists what is termed today a war psychology" by basically feeding tales of "Indian massacres and 'Popish plots' in which the red man, the lay Catholic and the Jesuit were the chief protagonists."<sup>14</sup> The first major newspaper published in the American colonies, *The Boston Newsletter*, hit the stands in 1704. (*Publick Occurrences*, published once in 1690, was censored for criticism of British rule.) Seventeenth-century settlers received their local news through Church sermons and town meetings, and relied on the British press for news from abroad. John Carpenter, Boston postmaster and publisher of the *Newsletter*, compiled his news from British reports. Interestingly, Carpenter has been called the "father of American journalism,"<sup>15</sup> although his pioneering newspaper has been cited as a model of anti-Catholic rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> Either directly or indirectly, Britain exploited the fears of its colonial subjects through the media, essentially securing loyalty through an excessive degree of anti-Catholic propaganda.

The settlements of Quebec and Montreal, for instance, dramatically magnified the image of the Catholic French as fearful rivals to the British colonies. The colonials feared that French missionaries would woo Native American converts as political allies. The

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<sup>14</sup> Sister Mary Augustina, *American Opinion of Roman Catholicism in the Eighteenth Century* (Columbia University Press, New York, NY: 1936) 228.

<sup>15</sup> Herbert A. Kenny, *Newspaper Row: Journalism in the Pre-Television Era* (The Globe Pequot Press, Chester, CT: 1987) 5.

<sup>16</sup> Augustina, 184.

French Jesuits, whom the Puritans found very threatening and suspect, were viewed as a “dangerous menace, a particularly subversive brand of secret agents doing the bidding of the Vatican.”<sup>17</sup> The depth of papal suspicion is evident in the colonials’ response: any Catholic priest in Massachusetts could be sentenced to life in prison.

Such laws quickly became more offensive than defensive; Catholics took the hint and steered clear of New England. As a result, there were generations of colonials who had no contact with Catholic laymen or clergy, which had the effect of preserving the distorted image of Catholics they had drawn from popular literature and newspapers.

One historian notes that “to cite the colonial newspapers which printed anti-Catholic items would be to call the roll of the colonial press.”<sup>18</sup> These newspapers did not feature editorials in the traditional sense, but rather printed letters either addressed to the editor or the general public. These pages formed a public forum for debate on any number of topics, open to anyone with an opinion or complaint. Sarcasm and satire were overriding features of colonial newspaper and magazine commentary. “News reports” from Rome often ridiculed the pope, such as this item from the *New England Courant* in June 1723:

“[The Pope] still complains of a Pain in his Foot, which undoubtedly affects his Toes; and we all know that the honour and Happiness of a great Number of Catholicks depends upon the Health of his Holiness’s Great Toe, which by this Account, I am afraid, is not in a kissing Condition.”<sup>19</sup>

Colonial newspaper editors found that the best way to appeal to their readership was a combination of humor, satire, and literary features. In March 1741, *The American Magazine*, the first original magazine published in the colonies, ran a satirical dialogue

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas H. O’Connor, *Boston Catholics: A History of the Church and Its People* (Northeastern University Press, Boston, MA: 1998) 7.

<sup>18</sup> Augustina, 182.

<sup>19</sup> Augustina, 184.



between a Catholic priest and an anonymous emissary. One historian has noted that this periodical “devoted a disproportionate amount of space”<sup>20</sup> to the dangers of Popery. The mocking exchange includes a leading line of questions from the emissary that allows the fictitious priest to explain the proper way to spread the Catholic religion. “Believe that you are able to do Wonders and you shall do them!” says the priest. “If you can bring them to renounce Reason, and depend on their spiritual Guides, what Difficulty can there be in this? You know that the Plan is laid to wreft the Bible out of their Hands by giving it up to your pious Explications.”<sup>21</sup>

This excerpt reveals another leading source of Protestant suspicion: the Roman Catholic Church seemed to deprive its followers of freedom of thought. The hierarchy interpreted the scriptures for the faithful, leaving no room for alternate understandings. Protestants developed a harsh stereotype of Catholics as mindless sheep, willing to accept any order or explanation from a Roman collar, without question. This “herd mentality” fueled characterizations of Catholics as papist instruments, and of priests as abusers of power, with the pope as their corrupt leader.

The colonials viewed clergy as generally suspect and immoral. They disapproved of their tremendous influence over the Catholic faithful, and especially questioned their motives. A Catholic nun writing on 18th-century anti-Catholicism best captured this notion: Protestants believed that “so numerous were their [clergymen’s] opportunities for spreading vice under the cloak of religion, that their presence in a community might be

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<sup>20</sup> Augustina, 192.

<sup>21</sup> *The American Magazine*, The Facsimile Text Society (Columbia University Press. New York, NY: 1936) 96.

likened to a hidden cancer secretly spreading its virus through the entire social organism.”<sup>22</sup>

Protestants viewed Catholics as victims of an intellectual slavery under the bonds of Rome. When the colonies began to feel the oppressive hand of Britain in the 1760s, this image became much more potent. In 1765, a young John Adams publicly expressed his belief that Catholicism was incompatible with liberty, saying that it had enchained humans “for ages, in a cruel, shameful, and deplorable servitude.”<sup>23</sup> Three years later, his cousin Sam Adams said that the colonies had more to fear from Popery than the Stamp Act. Adams, writing under the pen name “A Puritan,” published a series of anti-Catholic articles in the *Boston Gazette* to warn his fellow citizens of the impending threat of Popery. The first article appeared on April 4, 1768:

“There is a variety of ways in which Popery, the idolatry of Christians, may be introduced into America, which at present I shall not so much as hint at ... Yet, my dear countrymen, – suffer me at this time ... to warn you all, as you value your precious *civil* liberty, and everything you call dear to you, to be upon your guard against POPERY.”<sup>24</sup>

The series concluded with Adams’s argument that only Protestant representatives could be trusted to protect civil rights. In the years leading up to the outbreak of the Revolution, buzz words such as “liberty,” “tolerance,” and “rights” dominated barroom debates, but the colonials held an exclusionary view of these ideals.

These masterminds of the American Revolution would soon have a change of heart. As the French grew more attractive as allies in a war against Britain, their image as horned devils began to disappear. Catholics faced discrimination in every facet of life, but, as historian Sr. Mary Augustina points out, “one looks in vain for recruiting orders

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<sup>22</sup> Augustina, 14.

<sup>23</sup> O’Connor, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Augustina, 187.

forbidding the enrollment of Roman Catholics.” Almost overnight, the religion that had made them so insufferable as neighbors became less of a sticking point. Papists or not, they could handle a weapon and march into battle and, facing the British army, the colonial militia could “ill afford to make distinction between Protestant and Catholic, Jew and Gentile, believer and unbeliever.”<sup>25</sup>

During the Revolutionary years, Protestant Americans were exposed to the rituals of the French soldiers, which help dissolve the Catholic aura of intrigue and pagan mystique. Protestant and Catholic fought together for the same cause, lifting long-held doubts about Catholic patriotism.

The ideals of the Revolution found expression in the Constitution, which prevented Congress from making any “law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” and served as a model for the young nation. The change of heart trickled down to the state level slowly. During the ratification process, people in Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Connecticut still expressed fears about “popish officials” and called for official religion tests. One Massachusetts delegate wrote that he “shuddered at the idea that Roman Catholics, Papists, and Pagans might be introduced into office and that Popery and the Inquisition may be established in America.”<sup>26</sup>

Several states specifically excluded Catholics from holding political office, including Massachusetts. The state’s bill of rights that was drafted in 1779 called for equal protection under the law to all religious denominations, but the same document required all state officials to take an oath against the authority of any “foreign prince,

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<sup>25</sup> Augustina, 310.

<sup>26</sup> Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (Quadrangle Books, Inc., Chicago, IL: 1964) 22.

person, prelate, state, or potentate.”<sup>27</sup> This backhanded maneuver reveals that the same suspicions still restrained Americans from embracing pure religious tolerance. Many states quickly revised their constitutions to more closely reflect the spirit of liberalism at the federal level. Catholic liabilities, religious tests, and documented state religions faded away. Massachusetts completed this process a bit later than others; the separation of church and state was made official in 1833.<sup>28</sup>

At the turn of the 19th century, only about 1,000 of Boston’s residents were Catholic, and they gladly took the low-rung jobs that nobody else would fill, which helped the economy without posing any real job threat. Sharing the city with Catholic residents was quite congenial. Boston’s first bishop, French-born Father Jean Cheverus, served as the spokesman for the small Catholic community with such charm, moderation, and political sophistication that he immediately won the praise of the Boston Brahmins.

These advances occurred in a period of symbiotic, stable relations between the city’s dominant Protestant Brahmins and minority Catholics. By 1820, the size of the Catholic population had doubled; by 1830, it had reached more than 7,000.<sup>29</sup> Their numbers grew problematic on a political, social, and economic level, all of which were underscored by an outbreak of violence and rioting.

Most of these new immigrants came from Ireland, which held particular significance for a Protestant city. Once again, it is necessary to dip into English history. The harsh penal laws of William I had been passed to rid Ireland of its Catholicism, but they ended up having the opposite effect. The laws identified the religion with Ireland to such an extent that “Catholic” and “Irish” became synonymous terms. More significantly,

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<sup>27</sup> O’Connor, 14.

<sup>28</sup> O’Connor, 23.

<sup>29</sup> O’Connor, 55.

Ireland's sense of patriotism and loyalty became intertwined with its religion. The Catholicism of the Irish newcomers constituted a major part of their identity, especially in a new country.

The flood of Irish-Catholics to Boston reignited the city's anti-Catholic fervor, but religious differences were not the primary cause for dispute; the problem was economic. The Irish numbers posed a huge threat to the labor market, and working-class Bostonians responded in a self-serving and offensive manner: they breathed life back into the old fears of papal conspiracy and control. Bostonians had no need to invent new material for propaganda; they could dip into almost 200 years' of anti-Catholic literature. The religious angle offered preachers, politicians, and newspapers a cheap and easy route toward cruel intimidation, and it worked. The American Nativist movement was more about numbers and dollar signs than any renewed stirrings of anti-Catholic sentiment. The propaganda spinners of the so-called Nativist movement needed a message with enough theatric potential to appeal, once again, to the basest fears of the population.

Tensions between Boston Protestants and Catholic immigrants reached a climax in August 1834 with the burning of the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown. That summer also marked the first appearance in Boston of the Catholic Church's perceived connection with sexual depravity.

The convent at Mount Benedict served as a relatively prestigious school for young ladies, but fictional tales of immoral convent life ignited the imaginations of local residents. One woman claimed to have escaped from the convent, and her fabrications incited a frenzy of rumors that turned many suspicious eyes toward the school. Her story even became a best-seller, *Six Months in a Convent*, which sold 200,000 copies in its first

month of publication.<sup>30</sup> This theme of clerical immorality had become increasingly popular in fiction. *Awful Disclosures* by Maria Monk captivated its readers with tales of scandal and indecency at the Hotel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal, and *The Scarlet Letter*'s Arthur Dimmesdale set a precedent for the pathetically lustful characterization of priests in literature. Protestant readers became infatuated with these topics because they contained a sense of the intrigue that formed a major cultural barrier between the two religions:

“The best-selling convent exposes participated in a larger cultural debate as well – over the proper nature of the bourgeois family ... The rejection of standard reproductive roles could enable startling deviations: the nun could claim a suspicious autonomy from marriage and motherhood, and the monk could appropriate the role of the mother ... In its varied formations as intemperate immigrant Irish worker; as pallid, consumptive nun; as lustful, duplicitous priest, the Catholic body marked the boundaries of a normative Protestant self intent on a purity that would signal the attainment of perfection.”<sup>31</sup>

Protestants looked at convents with curiosity and disapproval, fueled by both fictional excesses and a genuine misunderstanding of Catholic culture. They viewed the Catholic clergy as abnormally defiant to biological needs and social norms.

In July 1834, a member of the Ursuline Convent suffering from mental illness wandered to a local home, and the news snowballed to all ends of the city with distorted details of perversion and debauchery. Within a few days, many people believed that she had been forcefully returned to the convent and locked in a basement dungeon as punishment. On August 8, the Boston *Mercantile Journal* reported that the young woman was missing, using material gathered from unsubstantiated rumors. The sensationalized and incorrect story appeared in two other Boston papers, the *Morning Post* and

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<sup>30</sup> O'Connor, 63.

<sup>31</sup> Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (University of California Press. Los Angeles, CA: 1994) xxv.

*Commercial Gazette*, on August 9.<sup>32</sup> Two days later, a mob of about 50 laborers stormed the convent, forced out the nuns and students, and burned the building to the ground.

This tragedy and several other outbursts of mob violence – including the Broad Street Riot in June 1837, in which hundreds of native Bostonians and Irishmen fought in the midst of a Catholic funeral procession – originated with the city’s working class that was threatened by the influx of Irish immigrants. The upper classes may not have been overjoyed with the newcomers, but they also had no immediate concerns over job security from Irish peasants. In fact, many prominent Brahmins publicly condemned the attack on the Ursuline Convent and several Protestant journals likewise responded to the highly objectionable use of violence.<sup>33</sup> The educated citizens among the upper classes were not as vulnerable to the sensationalistic anti-Catholic rhetoric spewing from the presses and the pulpits. The embellishments of the Nativist campaign took hold in the workers’ camps, where tall tales about evil popish plots and a sexually deviant sisterhood were taken as fact, not fiction.

The anti-Catholic crusade of the secular press gained a key ally in the early 19th century from the rapid expansion of the religious press. The religious press formed a vituperative organ of steady propaganda that dictated public opinion among its vast and loyal readership. The trend began with the Presbyterian *Boston Recorder* in 1816, followed by the Baptist *Christian Watchman* three years later. By 1827, there were 30 religious newspapers in circulation with a clearly anti-Catholic editorial policy.<sup>34</sup> The Boston and New York-based publications, most notably the *Recorder* and *New York Observer*, led the anti-Popery campaign.

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<sup>32</sup> Billington, 72.

<sup>33</sup> O’Connor, 64.

<sup>34</sup> Billington, 43-44.

By the end of the 1830s, the stage was set for a head-on clash of special-interest newspapers. No Catholic journals existed in the United States until 1822, when the *United States Catholic Miscellany* was founded by a Charleston, S.C., bishop solely for the defense of the Church. The Catholic response developed slowly; by 1829, there were only three Catholic publications, including Boston's *Jesuit*, the predecessor to *The Pilot*.

Benedict Fenwick, Boston's second Roman Catholic bishop, founded *The Jesuit* to counter the religious media attacks with an equally-harsh Catholic rebuttal. Fenwick assumed his high-profile position during a period of fever-high tensions in Boston, and as historian O'Connor puts it, "He wasn't going to take any lip."<sup>35</sup> Whereas Cheverus preferred to stay out of politics as much as possible, Fenwick responded quickly and aggressively. The short-lived and unwise name *The Jesuit* (Nativists loathed the Jesuits most of all), survived for only three issues. *The United States Catholic Intelligencer* and *Literary and Catholic Sentinel* also graced its masthead before Patrick Donahoe took over as editor in 1836, baptizing the paper under its contemporary name, *The Pilot*.

After the Irish Famine of the 1840s brought tens of thousands of new arrivals to Boston, the Nativists began to organize into local societies with patriotic names such as "The Sons of '76" and "The Order of the United Americans." These societies were so secretive that their members claimed to "know nothing," but they organized into a short-lived political force that swept the nation. Before its opponents even knew the party's name, 75 Know-Nothing candidates were elected to Congress in 1854, pledging to wage war on Catholics and foreigners.<sup>36</sup> The victories were truly phenomenal: a few thousand Americans had abandoned traditional party ties to support a truly radical and spontaneous

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas H. O'Connor, personal interview, 16 Feb. 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Billington, 388.



organization. The party became a real force in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, and it staged a coup in Massachusetts. Know-Nothings captured the mayor's office in Boston, the governor's seat, the entire state senate, and all but four representative seats.<sup>37</sup>

Know-Nothing fervor died down pretty quickly because the party failed to achieve any of its political objectives. Several newspapers ridiculed the party as the "Say-Nothing" and "Do-Nothing" party.<sup>38</sup> Many of the party members serving in state legislatures had absolutely no prior experience in government, leaving the door wide open for critics to point out that, in fact, they really did know nothing.

The press turned fairly sharply against the Know-Nothings. By the end of 1855, fairly critical coverage, coupled with the party's weak legislative track record, painted the Know-Nothing party as ridiculous. One mocking critic wrote:

"The pretended Know-Nothing apprehension lest a successor to Julius II should acquire supremacy over the American Union, is as absurd an anachronism, as would be the anticipation of a Carthaginian invasion, or the subjection of the country by mail-clad warriors of a descendant of William of Normandy."<sup>39</sup>

The portrayal of the Know-Nothing platform premise as anachronistic is very telling. The nation had matured a great deal since the Catholicism of Canada was widely considered a serious threat to national security in the 1760s. At the national level, the "papist threat" was no longer a tangible concern, but anti-Catholic rhetoric and imagery remained potent. In short, the Know-Nothing party died, but Nativism lived on. The anti-Catholic spin provided a convenient and endlessly malleable angle for abolitionist propaganda as the slavery issue catapulted to the forefront of politics.

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<sup>37</sup> O'Connor, 95.

<sup>38</sup> Billington, 418.

<sup>39</sup> Billington, 419.

New England was a strong supporter of the abolition movement, and it worked out that the majority of fervent Nativists were also passionate abolitionists. Some of their more potent anti-Catholic speeches and writings included a slavery metaphor, portraying any believer in the Catholic faith as a helplessly chained victim of papal bondage. This motif had already worked once and, apparently at a loss for creativity, many of these Nativist-turned-abolitionists attacked American slavery for its Romanism.

Irish Catholics in Boston found themselves in a predicament. *The Pilot* had come out in support of slavery in November 1850. The paper's editor drew on remarks by Pope Gregory XVI to explain that, according to the Church, slavery was "neither a moral evil nor a sinful practice."<sup>40</sup> Like a war, it was an unpleasant reality. This type of justification certainly didn't do much to help the Catholic image.

Conversely, German Catholics in the South openly opposed slavery, a position that cemented their seat on the bad side of the wealthy slaveowners. As a result, the two regions were polarized on the immediate issue but still united against Catholicism:

To fight the machinations of Rome was to displace the specter of civil war; more generally, to imagine Rome as protean conspiratorial agent, confusingly allied with both pro- and anti-slavery forces, was to imagine an America still joined by common religious concerns.<sup>41</sup>

In the words of antebellum Catholic historian Jenny Franchot, anti-Catholicism had developed into a useful tool due to its "strategic flexibility."<sup>42</sup> The No-Popery angle had been manipulated to such a degree that it had practically abandoned any connection to its religious roots. This particular example best exemplifies the illogical route of self-serving rationalizations reliant upon any possible antagonistic association with

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<sup>40</sup> O'Connor, 100.

<sup>41</sup> Franchot, 104.

<sup>42</sup> Franchot, 101.

Catholicism. Americans stretched the anti-Catholic slant to such a degree that many actually became convinced that the Romanism of slaveholders, not racism, was the problem.

This pitch didn't take hold with everyone. In 1835, the *Western Monthly Magazine* had aptly noted that "the abuse of the Catholics is a regular trade, and the compilation of anti-Catholic books ... has become a part of the regular industry of the country, as much as the making of nutmegs, or the construction of clocks."<sup>43</sup> Anti-Catholicism worked because enough Americans bought it. The "trade" metaphor works well, especially when considered with the basic principle of supply and demand. The working class needed a good reason to loathe the immigrants with whom they competed for jobs, housing, and status. They never had to admit their own shortcomings in these areas if they narrowed their hatred and violence down to irreconcilable religious differences.

This situation was greatly irritated by the increasing upward mobility of second-generation Irish Catholics in the 1880s. A study of the Boston Irish during this period found that their middle-class status increased from 10 to 38 percent, and the number of low manual workers fell from 65 to 36 percent.<sup>44</sup> The Nativist working class, true to form, kicked into defensive mode.

The American Protective Association (APA) organized in Iowa in 1887, invoking rhetoric of the global papal conspiracy and adding a new opposition to parochial schools. Thomas Nast's "American River Ganges" illustrated this APA platform piece, which reveals that the increasing success of Catholics now caused working-class Americans to

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<sup>43</sup> Billington, 346.

<sup>44</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, NY: 1985) 142.

feel the sting of competition at the schooling level. Following the pattern of Know-Nothingism, the APA movement took a strong hold in Massachusetts, where resentment toward immigrants was particularly strong.<sup>45</sup>

The APA was an anti-Catholic movement detached from any political party. Other parties, most notably the Republicans, exploited its popularity to capture APA votes. The 1884 presidential election was seasoned with the Republican slogan “rum, Romanism, and rebellion,” which warned the public against the three evils of the Democrats. For almost a century, the Democratic party had held a monopoly over the immigrant vote. The pre-Republican Federalists had extended the naturalization period from 5 to 14 years under the Alien Act of 1798, and the prospect of a naval war with the British seemed lively with the Jeffersonian Democrats after 1800. For Irish Catholics, the choice for party alignment must have been glaringly obvious.

At the height of the APA, Republicans profited from a little anti-Catholic seasoning because it proved politically feasible. The Democrats, secure with their dependable voting bloc, had no need to succumb to such pressure from fad movements. The loyalty of its immigrant base was the best thing going for the Democrats.

The first issue of *The Boston Globe* ran off the presses on Monday, March 4, 1872. Within a few years, under the leadership of its general manager Charles H. Taylor, the *Globe* aimed at the broad interests of the immigrant demographic in Boston, then largely ignored by the Boston press.<sup>46</sup> By the 1880s, Taylor, now publisher, had gathered an editorial staff of about 15 editors and reporters, with names such as McNally and

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<sup>45</sup> O'Connor, 153.

<sup>46</sup> Louis M. Lyons, *Newspaper Story: One Hundred Years of The Boston Globe* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University. Cambridge, MA: 1971) 47.

O'Meara. One reporter was a graduate of Trinity College, a Catholic school. Another staffer, Irish-born Michael P. Curran, had worked for *The Pilot*.

Heading straight into the APA rush of anti-Catholic revival, the *Globe* set out to support labor, Democratic politics, and the Irish cause. Teetering near bankruptcy after a decade in a highly-competitive newspaper environment, the *Globe's* agenda was a tremendous risk. But it succeeded. The paper owes much of its success today to the loyal readers of several generations of Irish-Catholic Americans.

## Chapter Three

### A LIVELY, PROGRESSIVE, DEMOCRATIC NEWSPAPER

“My theory was that the news columns should be entirely independent and give impartially the news of all parties. Both parties were entitled to a full share of the columns of any enterprising daily newspaper whatever its political bias on the editorial page.”

—*Charles H. Taylor, Globe publisher, 1878*

It would have been useless to ask a 19th-century Bostonian to meet at Downtown Crossing. The Common, Rowes Wharf, Faneuil Hall, Beacon Hill, or even Jake Wirth's pub would be familiar points. Today, the stretch of Washington Street between Milk and State Street attracts bargain-hunters and window shoppers, many of whom are unaware that an earlier era once hailed the excitement of this crowded urban scene.

At the height of journalistic splendor in Boston, Newspaper Row teemed with reporters, pressmen, paper boys, delivery trucks, politicians, attorneys, news-hungry citizens, organ grinders, bookies, and even bootleggers. Most of the newspapers that ran off the presses here are as obscure today as the reputes of Newspaper Row: the *Boston Journal*, the *Boston Transcript*, the *Traveller*, the *Boston Telegram*, the *Boston Evening Record*, the *Boston Courier*, and the *Boston Post*, to only name a few. Three papers survive the death of the Row: the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Boston Herald*, and the *Boston Globe*.

Consider the historical significance that anchored the area. John Winthrop, who led the first band of Puritans to Boston in 1630, ruled the city with a theocratic hand from his home on Spring Lane, which connects Washington to Devonshire Street. At each end, the Old South Meeting House and Old State House played host to scores of 18th-century sermons and discussions with an anti-Catholic tone. In those days, Washington Street served as the main thoroughfare for the city, and with Beacon Hill only a stone's throw away, the political dominance of the Nativists, the Know-Nothings, and the APA played out on the same pavement.

The first Boston papers on the Row were Republican: the *Journal* was a strong party organ, followed by the *Advertiser* and the *Herald*. The businessmen who invested

in these papers managed to concern themselves with circulation figures without noting that the majority population was increasingly comprised of Irish Catholic immigrants with Democratic leanings. The *Boston Transcript* served the Brahmins in the Back Bay from 1830 to 1941. Although early columns spoke out against the burning of the Ursuline Convent, the regular sacking of Irish homes, and the violence of the Broad Street riots, the paper later turned toward Know-Nothingism in the 1850s. One articulate description says that the Transcript “comforted the Brahmin old stock with its editorials and with a cultural menu that dealt authoritatively with genealogy, grandfather clocks, the departed chestnut tree and the Constitution which it printed in full for a full page every Wednesday.”<sup>47</sup> Such was the state of Boston journalism.

The *Globe* joined the fray in March of 1872 as a Republican paper with little distinction.<sup>48</sup> It would have been a rapid failure if general manager Charles H. Taylor did not save the paper from bankruptcy in October. He strengthened the paper’s financial situation and prepared to debut a revamped *Globe* in 1878. On March 4, Taylor teased the new focus and improved style in an editorial entitled “A Live, Progressive, Democratic Newspaper”:

“On Thursday, March 7th, *The Boston Daily Globe* will issue morning and evening editions in folio form, and the price will be reduced to 2 cents per copy.

It will contain the latest news from all parts of the world in each edition up to the hour going to press, and will be, in every sense, a live newspaper.

In this new departure *The Globe* will maintain, to the best of its ability, those great Democratic doctrines inaugurated by Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe, sustained by Jackson and Polk, and as promulgated in the platform adopted by the Democratic National Convention held at St. Louis in 1876.

*The Globe* will advocate all liberal measures which will advance the interests of the masses in their social and financial condition, and will endeavor

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<sup>47</sup> Lyons, 272.

<sup>48</sup> Lyons, 31.



to promote their moral and intellectual welfare.”<sup>49</sup>

This brief introduction contained several significant points. Taylor cut the price of the *Globe*, making it available to more people of all social classes. Most of the rival papers sold at three cents and appealed to a readership of the Brahmin upper class and businessmen. Taylor hoped his paper would be read by the working man, women, and even children.

The “news from all ports” included a deliberate news focus on Ireland, coupled with strong editorial backing in its struggle against Britain. A *Globe* historian notes that support for the Irish cause was “the natural if not inevitable road for the Democratic *Globe* to take,” a position that distinguished it as “the only paper then championing the Irish in Boston, a monopoly worth something.”<sup>50</sup> This emphasis yielded worthwhile returns for the *Globe*: circulation increased from 8,000 to 30,000 within three years, and to 100,000 by 1886.<sup>51</sup> The interests of the Boston Irish – and all immigrants, for that matter – had received little attention from the city’s papers, which had given space to the reigning anti-Catholic rhetoric of the Nativists. The Irish, quickly growing into a dominant population, latched onto the only paper that appealed to their interests. The *Globe* hit a gold mine with Taylor’s two-fold concentration on labor issues and Democratic politics, but the coverage and support for the Irish cause solidified its loyal base. As George Bernard Shaw drolly commented in 1916, “It is only the Irishman whose enthusiasm for his birthplace increases as the square of his distance from it.”

The *Globe* has maintained its identity as a Democratic paper with essentially liberal positions, true to Taylor’s vision. Through the 1920s, these positions included

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<sup>49</sup> “A Live, Progressive, Democratic Newspaper,” editorial, *The Boston Globe*, 4 March 1878: A4.

<sup>50</sup> Lyons, 48.

<sup>51</sup> Lyons, 31 and 60.

support of organized labor, better wages, minimum-hour laws, women's suffrage, tariff reductions, educational issues, and opposition to literacy tests. None of these issues would put the newspaper at odds with the Catholic Church in Boston. In fact, *The Pilot* was advocating many of the same equal-rights issues on behalf of its readership. This dynamic changed dramatically in the late 1960s, when the *Globe* was practically a centenarian in the city. The *Globe* stayed loyal to its promise to "advocate all liberal measures." The problem was that society's definition of 'liberal' adapted to contemporary standards, but the nature of the Catholic Church made its positions more static. As Spotlight Team editor Walter V. Robinson notes, "If you take any Boston cardinal's top priorities, the *Globe* has often been in lock-step on many of the issues. Because of the nature of institutional power in Boston – the Church being the pre-eminent institution – any question of that authority either in editorial or newspaper pages is construed negatively."<sup>52</sup> A brief look at the relationship between the *Globe* and its Catholic readership is necessary to understand the progression from loyalty to division.

During its first years, the *Globe* rode into the peak of the Nativist-revival movement of the APA with some impressive positions. In 1878, the paper supported a gubernatorial candidate who had waged a fruitless legislative campaign to restore the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown and had advocated social justice for Catholic immigrants.<sup>53</sup> The *Globe* successfully campaigned for hospitals to permit priests to administer the last rites to Catholic patients. In 1880, the *Globe* opposed legislation aimed at regulating private schools, which would have brought parochial schools under state jurisdiction.

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<sup>52</sup> Walter V. Robinson, personal interview, 11 March 2004.

<sup>53</sup> Lyons, 53.

In 1888, the push for women's suffrage became intertwined with a push for female voters to help defeat a school committee by means of a Catholic majority. A Republican organization with the slogan Save the Schools endorsed an anti-Catholic slate, and the *Globe* editorialized against the "sudden warming up of the cold gray ashes of Know-Nothingism."<sup>54</sup>

The *Globe* met formidable competition from the *Boston Post* after it was purchased by Edwin A. Grozier, a New York newspaperman and protégé of Joseph Pulitzer. Following Taylor's example, Grozier revamped the *Post* with a pro-labor stance and a strong, Democratic tone. Herbert A. Kenny, who reported for both the *Post* and the *Globe* and wrote a history of Newspaper Row, touches on this good-natured competition in his book:

For a while the *Globe* was the favorite paper of the Irish-Americans; although it remained in the affections of the Irish, however, Grozier took the lead. He made a distinct effort to appeal to the Catholics of Boston, who comprised, by the start of the twentieth century, a majority of the population. William Cardinal O'Connell's every interview was front-page material. All major Catholic events were covered."<sup>55</sup>

The *Post* appealed to the Catholic identity of the Irish by emphasizing its religious coverage, whereas the *Globe* attracted its Catholic readership through strong and balanced coverage of secular issues: labor, the Irish cause, and later, politics. Its editorial pushes for Catholics were grounded in equal-rights arguments, not any particular policy of religious preference.

The free silver issue of 1896 marked a turning point for the *Globe* that distinguished it from other Boston papers. The *Globe* strongly supported the gold standard, and after William Jennings Bryan made his impassioned Cross of Gold speech

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<sup>54</sup> Lyons, 69.

<sup>55</sup> Kenny, 55.

and won the Democratic nomination, Taylor decided the paper could not reverse its stance to endorse the Democratic candidate. In fact, the *Globe* stopped endorsing candidates all together until 1967. Taylor drafted a July 11 editorial that explained this decision and emphasized the editorial integrity of the *Globe*:

The majority has chosen as nominee for President one of the ablest representatives of the young free silver democracy of the West ... The *Globe* is not however prepared at this time to support candidate Bryan. It does not approve of the platform and fully believes ... all classes of people will see that the greatest good of the greatest number will best be promoted by the gold standard.<sup>56</sup>

The *Globe* offered detailed coverage of Bryan's campaign, including family profiles and regular campaign updates from a political correspondent. At the same time, the *Globe* continued its coverage of the gold issue with a series on gold mining. The paper teased the series by stating that "The letters will be non-partisan without bias toward gold or silver."<sup>57</sup>

For any proper newspaper, this balanced approach is necessary for any issue. During a period of sensational "yellow" journalism under media tycoons William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, Taylor did not allow dollar signs and circulation figures to influence his editorial decisions. But he did open the door for Grozier to reach out to the city's growing number of Democratic voters. The *Post* endorsement in state and city politics became a hot item, securing the paper's importance and popularity during every election season.<sup>58</sup>

After the 1880s, the second-generation Irish found that the civil service offered the best route for upward mobility. The working-class Nativists barred their opportunities

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<sup>56</sup> Lyons, 121.

<sup>57</sup> Lyons, 122

<sup>58</sup> Kenny, 36-37.

in small businesses and the trades, so the Irish flooded the police and fire departments, public works, and clerks offices. It was from these positions that the Boston Irish essentially captured city politics in the 20th century.

The debut of James Michael Curley in the 1890s introduced an era of unmatched extravagance in politics and journalism. The Protestant Boston Brahmins watched with horror as he set out to turn the Yankee establishment upside down, redirecting funds to benefit the underdog classes. Curley publicly proclaimed that “the day of the Puritan has passed; the Anglo-Saxon is a joke; a new and better America is here.” He paraphrased the anti-Democratic, anti-Catholic slogan of “rum, Romanism, and rebellion” and redirected it back at the Republicans: “The New England of the Puritans and the Boston of rum, codfish, and slaves are as dead as Julius Caesar.”<sup>59</sup> At first, the city’s press corps proceeded with caution, and then many completely turned against Curley, whom they viewed as a troublemaker. He would play a role on the political stage through 1955, and without any ringing endorsements from his editorial foes.

The *Globe* treated Curley’s political tenure with particular caution, breathing little life into its coverage of this fairly outrageous character. Whereas the *Globe* “took a bystander’s attitude”<sup>60</sup> toward Curleyism, as one reporter phrased it, the *Post* took the concept of civic journalism to a whole new level. Contemporary critics who reference the *Globe* as a biased paper must be either selectively forgetful or perhaps ignorant of this period. Consider some other cases from this so-called “golden age.” When Curley ran for mayor of Boston in 1913, the more conservative *Boston American* resorted to printing

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<sup>59</sup> Thomas H. O’Connor, *Bibles Brahmins, and Bosses: A Short History of Boston* (The Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston. Boston, MA: 1991) 185-186.

<sup>60</sup> Lyons, 266.

“Vote for Thomas J. Kenny” under every story.<sup>61</sup> Curley still won. In 1917, the *Post* may have taken a proactive role in convincing James A. Gallivan to challenge Curley for the Boston mayoralty in 1917. This alleged plan split the Irish vote between Curley and Gallivan, whom the *Post* endorsed, to the advantage of a third Democratic candidate, Andrew J. Peters.<sup>62</sup> These examples from both the conservative and liberal camps represent pure bias, manifested in a highly apparent newspaper agenda.

In 1937, after a three-decade history of mutual Curley-*Post* antagonism, the newspaper planted a dubious endorsement of Curley’s opponent in the mayoral race. On election day, the evening *Post* ran an eight-column, Page-One banner box that read:

**VOTERS OF BOSTON!**

Cardinal O’Connell, in speaking to the Catholic Alumni Association, said, “The walls are raised against honest men in civic life.” You can break down those walls by voting for an honest, clean, competent young man, Maurice J. Tobin, today. He will redeem the city and take it out of the hands of those who have been responsible for graft and corruption.<sup>63</sup>

Election day fell on All Souls’ Day that year, and as the evening Masses let out, hundreds of Tobin supporters distributed free copies of the paper. Cardinal O’Connell had never officially endorsed Tobin; not only was the box incorrect, it was deliberately misleading. The quoted statement had been made more than a month earlier without reference to any specific politician. And most readers did not notice where the quotation marks ended. Tobin won the mayor’s seat by 25,000 votes, and no doubt because most Catholic voters went to the booths after Mass. Curley learned that a phone call had been made to Lake

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<sup>61</sup> Kenny, 166.

<sup>62</sup> Kenny, 166.

<sup>63</sup> Kenny, 172.

Street from the *Post*'s offices the previous night, but there is no concrete proof of any shady dealings involving the cardinal.<sup>64</sup>

From a historical perspective, the *Globe* missed out on the fun of Boston's most lively journalistic era. But in a professional sense, the paper profited in the long-term from its earlier, more restrained editorial policy. The *Globe* didn't follow the whims of a single editor or sway with the passions of the era. Its stability stemmed from the dependability of its balanced coverage, which was almost a premature development in an age when sensationalism was the norm. The paper's nonpartisan approach earned respect from all corners of the city for its consistent fairness and balance. It was this reputation that secured permanence for the *Globe* in a city full of newspapers.

Boston has been dubbed both the cradle and graveyard of American journalism for a good reason: papers tended to rise and fall as regularly as the tides. These same papers suffered from their own special interests, and as Boston expanded and diversified, they suffered from inadequate ad revenues and deflated circulation numbers.

The *Post* stayed strong until the early 1950s, until struggling ad revenues forced its closing in 1956. A string of conservative endorsements had also burned the paper with a large chunk of its Boston readership, leaving its circulation numbers disproportionately from New Hampshire and Maine subscribers. By the 1930s, classifying the *Post* as the premier Democratic, Irish-Catholic newspaper was not entirely accurate. Consider its track record. It waged a full assault on Curley, the rags-to-riches hero of the Irish-Catholics. It reluctantly supported Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom the Boston Irish loved, and was critical of the New Deal. And then in 1952, the *Post* threw its support to Republican presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower. A former reporter recalled that

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<sup>64</sup> Kenny, 173.

“the Democrats of Boston were well aware that the *Post* had abandoned its tradition, and for days afterwards, the telephone lines into the *Post*’s offices were hot with all sorts of vituperative, abusive, denunciatory messages.”<sup>65</sup>

Two years after the demise of the *Post*, the *Globe* moved its offices to Morrissey Boulevard in Dorchester, marking the end of Newspaper Row. In the heyday of the Row, the *Globe* had a reputation as the city’s moderate paper. At one end lay the old-stock *Transcript* and conservative *Herald*, offset by the liberal, more sensationalistic style of the *Post* and *Boston American*, a Hearst paper started in 1904 and later absorbed by the *Herald*. These latter two papers had turned a conservative leaf by the 1930s, leaving the *Globe* as the city’s liberal newspaper by default.<sup>66</sup>

The *Globe* inherited much of the *Post*’s readership, primarily comprised of Irish-Catholic Democrats. In the post-Row era, the Boston newspaper industry was quickly reduced to two-paper competition between the *Globe* and the more conservative *Herald-American*. This duality better reflected the larger changes that had transformed the city’s demographic. The Brahmins had long lost their royal status and political power to the Irish Catholics. By the 1950s, Boston was, in all respects, an Irish Catholic city. This ironic twist must have had characters like John Winthrop turning over in their graves.

The political developments paralleled major societal changes that altered the Boston dynamic. William Cardinal O’Connell, who took the reins of the archdiocese in 1911, deserves tremendous credit for instilling a strong sense of unity among all Catholic immigrants. Under his leadership, this concept of unity became almost paradoxical. Historian Thomas O’Connor articulates the phenomenon:

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<sup>65</sup> Kenny, 225.

<sup>66</sup> Lyons, 147.



Using the impressive dignity of his position and the intimidating force of his personality, Cardinal O'Connell established a pattern of separatism throughout the archdiocese of Boston that was carefully designed to disentangle Catholics as much as possible from local Protestants and to free the Irish from all forms of Yankee influence.<sup>67</sup>

The dividing line now originated from the Catholic camp, which had encouraged assimilation under the 19th-century leadership of Bishops Cheverus, Fenwick, Fitzpatrick, and Williams. The immigrant Catholics had struggled for two centuries to gain acceptance from the Protestants as "Americans." Now, in the urban centers of Chicago, New York, and Boston, the confidence of second- and third-generation Catholic families, coupled with the emergence of strong Church-based communities, prompted Catholics to actively assert themselves as "Catholic Americans."

Catholic family life entirely revolved around the local parish. Young people attended parochial schools. They avoided popular organizations such as the Boy and Girl Scouts or YMCA centers. Instead, Catholic Youth Organizations (CYO) provided a network of extracurricular, athletic, and social programs for controlled diversion. In fact, the entire family structure followed a schedule dictated by religion. On Sundays and holy days, the entire neighborhood attended Mass together. The parish organized picnics, dinners, and charity events. If a family member needed help or advice, he or she consulted with a parish priest, who held superior moral standing within the community. Even today, residents in many Boston neighborhoods reference their homes in conversation by the nearest parish, instead of the village or exact street.

O'Connell intentionally focused attention on the development of this solid network under this authority. It represented the power and stability of the Irish Catholic underdog. O'Connell essentially made Boston Catholicism a marketable enterprise; his

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<sup>67</sup> O'Connor, 217.

every public appearance, ordination, and university lecture – in addition to large Catholic events and parades – attracted media attention, essentially forming a pointed archdiocesan publicity campaign. Unlike his more reserved predecessors, O’Connell – and Richard Cardinal Cushing after him – very much enjoyed the limelight.

The *Post* had offered close coverage of Church happenings and cardinal appearances big and small. As previously mentioned, it was this favorable treatment, not its political positions, that endeared it to many of its readers. The *Globe*, on the other hand, did not offer any preferential treatment to the Church, let alone any institution. The more accurate term that has been used to describe the coverage is ‘deferential.’ The high degree of respect that pervaded the culture did not dissipate at the newsroom door. The *Globe* Spotlight Team’s book on the scandal reflects on this period: “It was a different time. If the police pulled over a weaving car and saw that the driver was wearing a Roman collar, usually they would either drive him home or let him go with a warning: ‘Be careful, Father.’”<sup>68</sup> Boston Irish dominated the police departments, city halls, and courthouses. Journalists were no exception.

By the time the *Post* closed down in 1956, this culture was already beginning to change. The *Globe*’s new readers were not looking for consistent, page-one attention to Church matters. The *Pilot*, which had returned to Church hands under O’Connell, provided sufficient coverage for many Catholics who, heading into the ’60s, were becoming increasingly concerned with more secular issues. In many ways, the *Post* had lasted only as long as it had to.

Readers began to expect more from their newspaper. As the former divisions disintegrated, they looked less to special-interest papers. Bostonians were ready for a

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<sup>68</sup> The Globe Spotlight Team, *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church*, 120.

newspaper with the universal appeal of Taylor's vision. Taylor once articulated his philosophy for the *Globe*:

My theory was that the news columns should be entirely independent and give impartially the news of all parties. Both parties were entitled to a full share of the columns of any enterprising daily newspaper whatever its political bias on the editorial page.<sup>69</sup>

As a strict rule, there are no strict rules in journalism – only guiding principles.

Throughout the days of *Post-Globe* rivalry, the *Globe* remained consistent in its adherence to this philosophy. And when the *Globe* again assumed its preeminent status as the city's Democratic paper, nothing changed.

The change was occurring within American society. When Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville studied the American model in the early 19th century, he observed that religion appeared to be the unofficial primary institution in the United States. He viewed the moral, community-based framework of religious organization as an important, indirect support to any democratic system. Immigrants, especially, looked to religion as an escape from the struggles of daily life but also as a means for integrating into society. By the mid-20th century, the need for closely-knit religious communities decreased as a growing secularism developed from the ongoing conflict between the emphasis on the human agenda as individuals and the well-being of the larger community composed of those individuals.

Using the definition of post-modern philosophers, individualism refers to the sacredness of the human and his or her self-classification on a higher level than society – which, considering their complexities, includes religious communities. After Vatican II ended in 1965, an increasing number of Catholic Americans had difficulty reconciling

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<sup>69</sup> Lyons, 36.

religion as an organization to which they belonged or a component of their individual lives. In 1985, the modern philosopher Robert Bellah described this phenomenon as the “privatization” of religion, which played a much different role than that observed by Tocqueville. “Moral teaching came to emphasize self-control rather than deference,” wrote Bellah. “It prepared the individual to maintain self-respect and establish ethical commitments in a dangerous and competitive world, not to fit into the stable harmony of an organic community.”<sup>70</sup>

Tocqueville criticized democracy in America for drawing individuals to themselves and narrowing their vision, arguing that it could prove counteractive to the noble aims of a society based on participation. If this prophetic warning is specifically applied to religion, the result is the formula for secularization.

Bellah further commented on this growing trend: “Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious.”<sup>71</sup> Six years later in 1991, the philosopher Charles Taylor underscored this statement by his colleague: “We live in a world where people have a right to choose for themselves their own pattern of life, to decide in conscience what convictions to espouse, to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways that their ancestors couldn’t control ... In principle, people are no longer sacrificed to the demands of supposedly sacred orders that transcend them.”<sup>72</sup>

Both Bellah and Taylor offer a generalized reflection on changes in modern society. Indeed, in the 1970s, a growing number of Catholics began to deviate from

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<sup>70</sup> Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985) 222.

<sup>71</sup> Bellah, 142.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) 2.

official Church positions in their own politics. They felt increasingly comfortable differentiating their religious identity and practice from their personal views and voting habits. But in Catholic strongholds like Boston, many people were unprepared when their newspaper began criticizing Church positions, regardless of their own alignment.

In the 1960s, the Church emerged as a strong advocate for civil rights. Coupled with its record of charity work and support for labor, the Church earned a reputation for its liberal views. The national shift from class-based to gender issues turned the scale. When Pope John Paul toured the United States in 1979, he preached against divorce, birth control, abortion, the ordination of women, married clergy, and homosexuality. One journalist wrote that, “It was a formidable listing of prohibitions; and the most formidable thing about it was its finality.”<sup>73</sup> Three of these issues – birth control, abortion, and homosexuality – switched Church politics over to the right almost overnight.

When Church leaders were preaching against these evils, the *Globe* was championing them on its editorial pages. These positions did not just stem from the paper’s identity as a Democratic paper; as evidenced by early precedence during the gold standard, the *Globe* allowed itself to think independently. Rather, the *Globe* has a long history of defending civil rights and supporting women’s issues.

In 1965, the *Globe* began editorializing in favor of repealing Massachusetts’ outdated birth control law. The next year, it began openly questioning the role of Cardinal Cushing in influencing the slow progress of a new bill. An April 14, 1966 editorial read:

Last year’s effort was killed after the cardinal objected to the lack of these safeguards ... For Catholics in the Legislature and elsewhere there is no doubt now that the prelate bespeaks his deepest conviction when he says that “Catholics do not need to impose by law their moral views on other members of society.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Dolan, 454.

<sup>74</sup> Lyons, 376.

One week later, an April 22 editorial said, “For those legislators who support the measure, the words of the cardinal constitute a solid pillar of truth: ‘Catholics do not need the support of civil law to be faithful to their own religion.’” The *Globe* was basically giving an extra boost to politicians who may have been torn in their obligations as Catholic and secular lawmaker.

The bill passed, but restricted birth control use to married couples. The law resurfaced in 1970 when a man was prosecuted for distributing contraception to an unmarried woman. The case made its way to the federal Court of Appeals, which held the law unconstitutional on the grounds that it violated human rights. This argument was an important basis for the *Globe*’s position. Massachusetts, after all, was the last state to update its laws. The *Globe* editorial on July 7, 1970 hailed the state’s entrance into the 20th century, saying “the Massachusetts birth control law may now join the stocks and ducking stool and scarlet letter in limbo.”<sup>75</sup> The paper supported a move for the state to update along with the rest of the union, not set out as a pioneer. It constituted a matter of equality, not blind opposition to the Church’s position. The vigor with which the paper seemed to counter-influence Catholic positions, however, set it at odds with the Church leadership in the eyes of some. This suspicion would escalate as the abortion issue took stage.

On March 2, 1970, a *Globe* editorial on abortion – the first of many – again referenced the cardinal. “Cardinal Cushing sees abortion as the taking of human life ... But it may be that his broad views on birth control should be extended to abortion as well.” The paper included a quote from Cushing: “Forbidding in civil law a practice that

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<sup>75</sup> Lyons, 376.

can be considered a matter of private morality does not seem reasonable in a pluralistic society.”<sup>76</sup> Such a statement would suggest that the paper and Cushing were in agreement. This, of course, was not the case. As the abortion issue heated up, the Church assumed an active opposition to the practice, and it was not limited to moralistic homilies or prayers of the faithful. The Church began letter-writing campaigns to politicians and offered funding to interest groups.

The *Globe*’s opposition to the Church’s position did not stem from any contempt for Church leaders or the moral basis of their religious beliefs in these matters. Rather, the Church had become a key player in local and national politics, and its stance on such issues proved highly influential. The Church’s involvement in secular politics moved it from the private to public sphere.

*Globe* Spotlight editor Robinson commented on this new public role of the Church: “Because the Church chose to get involved in secular issues, the *Globe* has come to cover the cardinal as a power center that influences public policy.” The *Globe* has led strong editorial campaigns on issues like birth control and abortion, which, unintentionally, means that its positions are strongly opposed to those of the Church leadership. The anti-Catholic accusation gained a lot of force from this polarization. But Robinson made an interesting point on this fact: “We cover a lot of people in power who get irked. Tommy Menino hasn’t claimed that we’re anti-Italian. Mitt Romney hasn’t claimed that we’re anti-Mormon. The *Globe* is very aggressive with power centers in the city.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Lyons, 377.

<sup>77</sup> Walter V. Robinson, personal interview, 11 March 2004.

The anti-Catholic ring, however, has been used as a politician's defense. In 1997, Raymond Flynn, the former mayor of Boston and U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, began talking about running for governor. The *Globe* had endorsed Flynn during all three of his mayoral campaigns. In the meantime, a *Globe* reporter had accidentally encountered an intoxicated Flynn in the North End of Boston. The incident suggested a significant drinking problem, and the *Globe* questioned his ability to serve as governor. Flynn responded to the negative coverage by accusing the paper of anti-Catholicism. When prominent people say anything controversial, it tends to stick in people's minds. Thus the so-called anti-Catholic stance of the *Globe*.

Many of the *Globe*'s critics tend to hold a revisionist view of history. They claim that the *Globe* abandoned its pro-Catholic stance despite the interests of its readers. Others believe that the *Globe* represents an intimidating remnant of Protestant malice toward Boston Catholics. As this historical account shows, both assumptions are false.

In the 1970s, the *Globe* lost a distinctive portion of its Irish-Catholic readership. The paper took an aggressive stance during the South Boston school busing controversy by editorializing in favor of following a federal court's orders, which hurt business in this area. With only one other option, people who disagreed with the *Globe*'s position turned to the conservative *Boston Herald*. Still, it should be noted that in 2002, the *Herald* called for Cardinal Law's resignation several weeks before the *Globe*.

The *Globe* benefited immensely from its 125-year history under the leadership of the Taylor family. But even today, that consistency still exists. Note the striking similarities between the first Taylor's newspaper philosophy (printed above) and the following statement by Spotlight reporter Stephen Kurkjian:



Whether public agencies, from town halls to the White House, or private institutions, like multi-million corporations or Churches, the importance is to report thoroughly and fairly on those institutions that rule our lives. That level of thoroughness and fairness underlines everything that reporters do.

Kurkjian also specifically addressed the *Globe*'s coverage of the sex abuse scandal:

We do no one any favors – not our readers, or those served by the institutions, or even those, as we see in this case, who run the institutions – if because of fear or favor. We step away from that responsibility, and it has been proved again with the reporting that has been done on the Church.<sup>78</sup>

Those who see a “new anti-Catholicism” challenge this rationalization of the Church as an institution open to such intense media scrutiny. They maintain that the media did not treat this story – or most stories involving the Catholic Church, for that matter – with the same balanced approach as other issues.

The problem is not that the new anti-Catholicism is a bogus theory; indeed, its proponents make some excellent arguments and draw evidence from legitimate examples. The problem is that when it comes to the Church and the modern media, almost every word or image that can be construed as negative invokes the name of anti-Catholicism.

This historical look at the origins of the *Globe* and its century-old appeal to its Irish-Catholic readers disproves any notion of a long-standing record of anti-Catholicism by the newspaper. But an analysis of the case for the existence of a new anti-Catholicism and its relation to the media is a necessary study. How does the definition of the “new anti-Catholicism” stack up against the details of the *Globe*'s coverage of the priest sex abuse scandal in 2002?

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<sup>78</sup> The Boston Globe Spotlight Team, “Spotlight on Scandal: How the Boston Globe Broke the Story and Covered the Sexual Abuse Crisis,” The Church in the 21st Century Initiative, Robsham Theater, Boston College. 23 Oct. 2002.

## Chapter Four

### THE “NEW” ANTI-CATHOLICISM

Only a very \_\_\_\_\_ person believes in Catholicism.

- a. stupid
- b. stupid
- c. stupid
- d. stupid

— *National Lampoon Magazine*

The “old anti Catholicism” of Popist plots and Know-Nothingism in the United States is generally said to have ended with the election of President John F. Kennedy in 1960. Writing in 1953, the historian Theodore Maynard made a premature reference to the emergence of a new prejudice: “A hundred and twenty years ago Protestants had definite religious beliefs which they have now generally lost. The foe is now a so-called liberalism that finds itself increasingly obliged to take up a secularist attitude.”<sup>79</sup>

Although Maynard fell short with other prophecies (“It is hardly foreseeable that a Catholic could be elected President of the United States”), he briefly touched upon an issue that would provoke tremendous attention in 2002: the “new” anti-Catholicism.

The theory surfaced again in 1977 when the sociologist Reverend Andrew Greeley published *An Ugly Little Secret*, which challenged the notion that anti-Catholicism in America had met its end. Several writers picked up on this idea, and in 1992 the conservative writer George Weigel officially baptized this offshoot as the “new” anti-Catholicism. Its proponents argue that after 1960, the rhetoric assumed a new political form. The threat of Catholics was no longer an imminent Vatican takeover of Protestant America; it stemmed from their hostility to liberal views – mainly women’s and gay rights.

The end of the last violent reaction against immigration in the 1920s produced books such as *Catholicism and the American Mind* by Winfred Ernest Garrison and *Will America Become Catholic?* by John F. Moore that preached of the incompatibility of the concepts of a United States and the Catholic Church. Such explorations are largely considered anachronistic today, especially since rational people no longer maintain a

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<sup>79</sup> Theodore Maynard, *The Catholic Church and the American Idea* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. New York, NY: 1953) 100.

siege mentality against the Church. It is, therefore, quite tricky to explain this July 1990

*Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial, penned in response to the National Catholic Bishops

Conference:

The Roman Catholic Church, it needs to be remembered, is quite literally an un-American institution. It is not democratic. The Church's views on due process and on the status of women, to name just a couple of key issues, are sharply at odds with those that inform the laws of American secular society. And its principal policies are established by the Vatican in Rome.<sup>80</sup>

Anti-Catholicism, it seems, still lives. Consider this excerpt from a 1998 article in *The Nation* by Tony Kushner, written after the murder of Matthew Shepard, a victim of gay-hating thugs in Wyoming:

On the subject of gay-bashing, the Pope and his cardinals and his bishops and priests maintain their cynical political silence ... denouncing the murder of homosexuals in such a way that it received even one-thousandth of the coverage his and his church's attacks on homosexuals routinely receive, this would be an act of decency the Pope can't afford, for the Pope knows: behind this one murdered kid stand legions of kids whose lives are scarred by the bigotry this Pope defends as sanctioned by God.<sup>81</sup>

Kushner concluded by calling the Pope a "homicidal liar." This name-calling is only a few degrees from infamous Nativist epithets such as the "Man of Sin," "Antichrist," "Son of Perdition," or even the "Abhorrent Whore of Babylon." Nativists viewed the pope as the ultimate leader of rival Catholic immigrants who, as evidenced by the Protestant version of history, were subversive and incapable of loyalty. Their allegiance to a foreign leader seemed to contradict any notion of the patriotic American citizen. In recent decades, papal criticism has arisen from the pope's status as the leader of an organization that actively opposes certain advances of modernity – namely, the social and political positions of the American left.

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<sup>80</sup> Mark S. Massa, SJ, *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (The Crossroad Publishing Company. New York, NY: 2003) 42.

<sup>81</sup> Jenkins, 105.

Weigel defines the “new” anti-Catholicism as a deliberate attempt to remove religion in any form from all public debate. In a way, it can be seen as a preemptive strike to defend democracy, which is reminiscent of the motivation behind the various manifestations of the old anti-Catholicism. The scope of this prejudice has been flushed out even more in recent years. In 2003, two noted theologians – Mark S. Massa, SJ and Phillip Jenkins – published books on this topic, both christened with the subtitle “The Last Acceptable Prejudice.” They argue that the new anti-Catholicism manifests itself in so many ways that, ironically, nobody seems to notice. At a recent lecture at Boston College, Jenkins said that anti-Catholicism is “not just a common prejudice. It’s so common, it’s invisible.”<sup>82</sup>

Both Massa and Jenkins say that modern criticism of the Catholic Church almost always oversteps the boundary into varying degrees of Catholic-bashing. It is perfectly acceptable to be critical of Church decisions or the actions of its leaders, such as priests or the pope, they say. The judgment can be directed at the institution, but not those beliefs that comprise the institutional identity, the authors contend. In short, the Church’s positions on birth control, abortion, homosexuality, marriage, celibacy, the ordination of women, and even the role of the laity should all be considered “off limits” because they are grounded in Catholic doctrine. Any criticism of these positions takes issue with all that the Church stands for, not just Catholics. Following this logic and considering the Church’s active political role, it is no wonder that Massa and Jenkins both managed to fill at least 200 pages with examples of this new anti-Catholicism. Admittedly, both writers

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<sup>82</sup> Phillip Jenkins, “The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice,” The Church in the 21st Century Initiative, Devlin 008, Boston College, 22 March 2004.

draw upon perfectly legitimate examples, but they tend to make sweeping generalizations to support their argument, especially in regard to the American media.

Jenkins's case is best summarized in the following excerpt:

For many people in the United States – particularly for opinion-makers in the mass media and in the academic world – Catholicism neither needs nor deserves the kind of protections that apply to other religious traditions. To the contrary, many observers hold the view that Catholicism, and specifically the organized Church, is itself a problem, a major opponent of social progress. In this assessment, the Church is a haven of reaction, especially on matters of gender and sexuality, and it deserves little sympathy when it is attacked because, frankly, it is so dependably on the wrong side.<sup>83</sup>

This assessment suggests that before the first article on the sex abuse scandal appeared, the American media –composed, apparently, entirely of liberals – was predisposed to cover the Church unfairly on an exclusive basis. Jenkins says that the views on social and gender issues expressed in various op/ed pages constituted not an alternative position, but rather a strong, anti-Catholic bias. This opposition to such Church positions inevitably seeped into the news coverage, amounting to a deliberately unfair portrayal of the Church. Jenkins even goes so far as to digress into a discussion about the impossibility of objective reporting on any topic.

Not surprisingly, Rev. Benedict J. Groeschel, the friar mentioned in the first chapter for his likening of the *Globe* to Satan, makes the case in blunter terms. He maintains that the American media “have chosen to exploit the current crisis affecting the Catholic priesthood because of the Church’s opposition to abortion and its refusal to accept homosexual liaisons as equivalent to marriage.”<sup>84</sup> Groeschel’s highly defensive reaction to the media coverage takes a superficial and simplistic look at the issue. The friar is joined in this evaluation of the Church crisis in the United States by the Vatican,

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<sup>83</sup> Jenkins, 18.

<sup>84</sup> Groeschel, 151.

which attributes the media attention to a sex-crazy press looking to sell newspapers with sensationalism. After all, sex sells, and if it involves the Catholic Church, it sells even better.

Even some critics from within the industry blame the liberal camp for problems with religion reporting. In his expose of the alleged liberal bias of the media, former CBS reporter Bernard Goldberg poses a frank question: “Do you think there might be more stories about religion if there were more conservative journalists running America’s newsrooms?”<sup>85</sup> The implication is clear: there are so few positive stories on religion because the liberal press does not care enough to report them. The theory of the new anti-Catholicism takes this critique one step further. The liberal press *does* care to report them, as long as the issue can be inflated and distorted to reveal the inherent problems within the Catholic Church.

Those who see this new anti-Catholicism come down very hard on the American media. Jenkins, however, singles out the *Globe* for one of the only press-friendly comments in his entire book. He describes the coverage as “absolutely proper, tough, investigative journalism, which deserved all the praise it received.”<sup>86</sup>

Father Richard John Neuhaus, publisher of the Catholic magazine *First Things*, is not as generous as his colleague in his absolution of the *Globe* from the embrace of the new anti-Catholicism:

It is pointed out that the *Globe*, like its owner the *New York Times*, is no friend of the Church ... [that] the messenger is not a neutral party. All that is true; but it is of limited pertinence ... in this case as in so many others through history, leaders of the Church are guilty of giving ammunition to

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<sup>85</sup> Bernard Goldberg, *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News* (Harper Collins Publishers. New York, NY:2002) 127.

<sup>86</sup> Jenkins, 138.

those who would attack her.<sup>87</sup>

Neuhaus may say that the *Globe* does not embrace the new anti-Catholicism, but his remarks are far from complimentary. Again, the notion of some history of anti-Church sentiment is loosely expressed without evidence. He also characterizes the coverage as a form of “attack,” a concept that negates any possibility of fairness or balance. According to Neuhaus, the Church itself is guilty for inciting the wrath of the *Globe*, which relieves the newspaper of any blame for the impact of the priest sex abuse scandal. This last point hints at the glaring problem with his assessment: the *Globe* was not waiting for an opportunity to pounce.

Law’s remarkable admission of knowledge of Geoghan’s history of abuse in his June 2001 deposition invited further inquiry by *Globe* reporters. What the reporters found that had not been concealed only kept them going. In this way, Neuhaus has a point; the Church did provide “ammunition,” but the Spotlight Team did not set out to find juicy evidence to expose the depravity of Catholic priests. As journalists, they had a responsibility to eliminate the possibility that the Geoghan case constituted any type of pattern. But the reporters had no idea what they would discover; in fact, several members of the Spotlight Team recall being absolutely shocked at their findings.<sup>88</sup>

A recurring criticism of the media coverage in 2002 is that the stories misrepresented the occurrence of sex abuse by priests, thereby making pedophilia seem like a rampant problem and casting suspicion on almost every Roman collar. At the national level, the number of accused priests constitutes a small fraction of the whole. In

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<sup>87</sup> Massa, 164.

<sup>88</sup> The Boston Globe Spotlight Team, “Spotlight on Scandal: How the Boston Globe Broke the Story and Covered the Sexual Abuse Crisis,” The Church in the 21st Century Initiative, Robsham Theater, Boston College. 23 Oct. 2002.



the Boston area, however, the proportion is much different. The archdiocese reports that it employed 887 priests in 2002. The Spotlight Team's website reports that credible allegations were made against 25 of those priests in 2002;<sup>89</sup> since 1950, more than 250 priests and archdiocesan workers have been accused.<sup>90</sup> Given the moderate size of the archdiocese and the frequent re-assigning of priests, it would be difficult for the *Globe* to exaggerate the impact of the abuse and cover-up in its primary reporting sphere.

Although the *Globe* is the largest metropolitan daily in New England, it does not compete on the same level nationally as other papers, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or *The Los Angeles Times*. The *Globe's* A section covers national and foreign news, but its overall emphasis is more local. The front page generally runs five to six lead stories every day, two of which get above-the-fold play. About half the time, the page-one layout distinguishes the regional story as the day's top story, either through relative headline or column size, accompanying photos or graphics, or article placement (the lead story typically appears at top right). In any case, the visual emphasis is clear. During 2002, the majority of stories related to the sex abuse scandal appeared under front-page banner headlines, which run across all six columns. The *Globe* did not make any exceptions for its presentation of these stories. Unlike the *New York Times*, the *Globe's* front page extends preferential treatment to the most compelling local stories above national and foreign news.

The priest sex abuse scandal rarely failed to produce a compelling story for page-one placement. From the viewpoint of the *Globe*, the Church had actively distinguished itself as a preeminent institution in city politics in the 20th century and, considering

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<sup>89</sup> *The Boston Globe* Spotlight Investigation: Abuse in the Catholic Church  
<<http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/>>.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Paulson, "Abuse study says 4% of priests in US accused," *The Boston Globe*, 17 Feb. 2004: A1.

Boston's demographic, the story affected a large majority of its readers. This two-fold justification has a third, perhaps more important, factor. This story depended on the release of Church documents and the emergence of victims willing to talk, both of which became available over the course of 2002. This constant flow of new information uncovered more alleged abusers, fresh angles, clearer evidence of a cover-up, and convinced more victims to come forward. The story, therefore, perpetuated itself. The Spotlight Team did not actively dig for ways to feed the issue. From its beginning to the present, the story unfolded for the reporters.

Jenkins notes that "in trying to contextualize the problem [of priest sex abuse], sections of the media slid into much more dubious attacks on the Church as a whole, and anti-Catholic imagery soon surfaced. Some used the crisis to demand a revolutionary transformation of the American Church in ways that would eliminate much of what had traditionally defined it as Catholic."<sup>91</sup> The advocates of the new anti-Catholicism cite celibacy in the priesthood, the ordination of women, homosexuality, the role of the laity, and the hierarchical system of leadership as tangential topics that surfaced during 2002. They maintain that the media used the sex abuse scandal as a springboard for yet another opportunity to shine a negative light on these issues. If this is the case, the editors had to initiate this reporting angle with this intention in mind, but, as discussed above, events and circumstances drove the story.

Boston was the origin for both the scandal and the ground-roots response from the laity. Voices of the Faithful, founded in Wellesley, Mass. in January 2002, raised several of these issues in active discussions. A large group of Boston priests formed the Boston Priest Forum. Boston College, a Catholic university located across from the archdiocesan

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<sup>91</sup> Jenkins, 138.

Chancery until April 2004, launched a Church in the 21st Century Initiative to take an in-depth, scholarly look at these issues and others over a two-year period. The appearance of celibacy and the ordination of women on the *Globe* pages corresponded with coverage of these groups and programs. It is important to note that these topics were first raised by members of the laity and clergy, not the media.

Several prominent *Globe* columnists took up these issues in 2002, such as Eileen McNamara, who has received the most flak for her pieces. In July 2003, a Jesuit administrator at Boston College shared that he had scheduled a breakfast with McNamara, a Catholic, to “get to the bottom of her gripe with the Catholic Church.” While it is unknown if he walked away with a satisfactory answer, it is certain that there is no shining evidence of any sort of anti-Catholic “gripe.”

Columnists do best when they keep themselves out of the writing as much as possible and allow featured interviewees to tell the story. This point is best illustrated in a column called “A Nun’s Call for Inclusion.” McNamara offered a perspective on the sex scandal from Sister Betsy Conway, a nun of 22 years: “Women religious offer a model of community and shared decision-making that could provide the hierarchy with an alternative way of operating, *suggests Sister Betsy*” (emphasis added).<sup>92</sup>

McNamara utilized less passive approaches to highlight issues stemming from the scandal. In December, she wrote a column that expressed the need for Boston’s new archbishop to consider a new role for priests and laity.

Confronted with the poisoned fruit of secrecy and authoritarianism, a culture that has historically quashed dissent and elevated exclusion to high art can either crumble or change. Change is never painless. Repairing the breach of

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<sup>92</sup> Eileen McNamara, “A Nun’s Call for Inclusion,” *The Boston Globe*, 13 March 2002: B1.

trust in Boston will require an archbishop willing not only to listen but also to respond to the voice of his priests and his people.<sup>93</sup>

McNamara uses strong language to describe the hierarchical Church structure, but it is difficult to characterize this piece as anti-Catholic if it criticizes one element of the Church – its leadership – to defend another element – the rights of the clergy and laity and their desire for active participation. These two excerpts are representative of McNamara’s columns, which reflected the view that the Church is out of step with the laity. McNamara did not formulate these opinions out of thin air; they were the product of the crisis.

Jenkins and Massa have a pair of academic twins in the academic world. Peter Steinfels’s *A People Adrift* and David Gibson’s *The Coming Catholic Church*, both published in 2003, thoroughly examine all of those allegedly unrelated issues that elevated the priest sex scandal into a Church-wide crisis. Perhaps, then, Steinfels and Gibson should be tagged as anti-Catholic, despite their noble attempts to move toward renewal.

Reverend Andrew Greeley, who wrote on the new anti-Catholicism in the late 1970s, said that Catholics were not concerned about it because they were not hurting. This observation is not properly discussed by Jenkins or Massa, who tend to underestimate the extent to which allegedly anti-Catholic criticism is representative of, rather than in opposition to, the views of a growing number of Catholic clergy and laymen. Steinfels notes that in 2002 “even more telling than the almost uniformly critical

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<sup>93</sup> Eileen McNamara, “Rome Faces New Reality,” *The Boston Globe*, 15 Dec. 2002: B1.

and frequent vehement views of media commentators in general were the no less critical and vehement views of Catholics themselves.”<sup>94</sup>

*Globe* columnist Adrian Walker, for example, expressly called for Law’s resignation in December 2002. His tone was forceful and harsh.

How can any sane person worship at an altar presided over by a cleric who provided the support – I refuse to call it moral support – to sick, depraved priests that Cardinal Bernard F. Law did?

Why would anyone walk into the Cathedral of the Holy Cross on Sunday and worship at his direction?<sup>95</sup>

Walker’s opening lines do not constitute undue abuse of a religious figure revered by thousands of faithful. By the end of 2002, hundreds of those faithful had called for Law’s resignation in more severe language, and dozens of protesters lined the sidewalks outside the Chancery and the Holy Cross Cathedral during Sunday Mass time. Jenkins or Massa would most likely argue that this column is anti-Catholic, but those readers who were actually offended by it constituted a definite minority. A joint poll conducted by the *Globe* and WBZ-4 in Boston as early as February 8, 2002 found that 48 percent of Catholics agreed that Law should resign.

Walter Robinson addressed the issue of claims of anti-Catholic sentiment in *Globe* columns. He said that many of the issues defined by Jenkins and Massa as tangential are actually crucial to the issue of the priest sex abuse scandal. “Would there still be a problem if the Church was a bottom-up institution? If there wasn’t a celibate priesthood? If women were allowed to be ordained? These questions have to be asked.” Robinson, who specialized in political reporting before coming to the Spotlight Team, used a political analogy to make an excellent point. The Church can benefit from

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<sup>94</sup> Steinfels, 65.

<sup>95</sup> Adrian Walker, “No Excuses for Law,” *The Boston Globe*, 5 Dec. 2002: B1.

conducting business more like the party leadership at a convention. The party platform must be open to discussion, and even disagreement, for any progress to take place – and those who express extreme, moderate, or alternate views cannot be eliminated from the party or labeled as traitors to the platform.<sup>96</sup>

Still, the mainstream view among the Church hierarchy holds that its members should be exempt from intense media scrutiny. To them, the idea that their role in institutional politics makes them fair game for questioning and criticism from the fourth estate is anathema. This fear of negative exposure convinced Church officials that protecting the institution was the number-one priority, which is a significant problem in its own right. The popular defense that characterizes the Church as the victim of a relentless and fierce media attack stems from this protective attitude, and as illustrated here, it is utterly groundless.

Ironically, in Boston, the case can easily be made that the intensity of the 2002 coverage was not the result of any long-standing anti-Catholicism by the *Globe*; the blame should rest, in fact, on the paper's longstanding pro-Catholicism.

With its 1872 debut, the *Globe* arrived too late for the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the Nativists, Know-Nothings, and the APA. It had no say in the No-Popery campaigns, the tales of convent depravity, or arguments over the subversive nature of Catholics. The *Globe*, rather, came to maturity in the early 20th century under the unwaveringly fair – almost to the point of cautious – guidance of the Taylor family. By the 1920s, Cardinal O'Connell was being treated as a true prince of the city. Just as Irish Catholics thrilled at the sight of James Michael Curley over-dressed in a coat and top hat, they loved their cardinal to make appearances adorned in his robes from his mansion on Lake Street.

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<sup>96</sup> Walter V. Robinson, personal interview, 11 March 2004.

Cardinals O'Connell and Cushing were true power players in the city, reveling in the dominant status of the once-lowly Catholic Bostonians. The cardinals, bishops, and priests commanded the utmost respect and obedience. As a result, a culture of deference took strong root in Boston, encompassing even the media.

It was not a conspiracy of lawyers and judges and journalists and cops paid off by the Church or even knowingly trying to protect it. It was a more subtle collusion borne of respect bordering on awe for an institution whose power seems to transcend the temporal. It was willful, but rarely conscious.<sup>97</sup>

At a October 2002 media panel Robinson opened his remarks by commenting on this cultural phenomenon. "When we as journalists cover institutions that are most revered in society, we do no one any good when we check our skepticism at the door. And this institution is clearly one in which journalists should have been asking tougher questions earlier." His remarks also hint at the degree to which this concept of Church deference has dissolved.

The *Globe's* coverage did not focus on sordid sex tales of priest abuse to sell newspapers. The Spotlight Team emphasized the cover-up as the dominant problem. In short, this story was not about celibacy, homosexuality, or the ordination of women. Such an assessment places the reporters on a rather base level. The story was about four decades of child abuse.

During an interview, Robinson asked the following powerful question: If this deference had ended sooner, would the abuse of children by priests have been uncovered sooner?

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<sup>97</sup> Frank Bruni and Elinor Burkett, *A Gospel of Shame: Children, Sexual Abuse, and the Catholic Church* (Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY: 2002) 178.

## Chapter Five

### MEDIAPHOBIA

“We gain some insight into the media blitz and its purposes from the following quotation of Adolf Hitler in 1937, someone whom I’ve never quoted before:  
“The Third Reich does not desire a *modus vivendi* [a way of getting along] with the Catholic Church, but rather its destruction with lies and dishonor.”

—*Rev. Benedict J. Groeschel*



The sex abuse crisis of 2002 must have offered a hint of déjà vu for many Church leaders; after all, this had all happened before – several times, in fact. In 1986, a man made public his abuse by Father Gilbert Gauthé of Lafayette, Louisiana. At the time, Gauthé was already in prison for the abuse of 37 boys, but the nation had never before heard the details of priestly sexual misconduct, or learned about the continuous reassigning of an accused priest by Church officials. The Diocese of Lafayette said this mishandling was an isolated problem, a response that crumbled when other victims came forward with information about two other accused priests who had been reassigned. This situation is eerily similar to the Geoghan case, which would unfold in the same manner 16 years later in Boston.

In the gap between the Gauthé and Geoghan cases, accusations of priest sex abuse surfaced sporadically across the nation. With the exception of the James Porter case in Fall River, Mass, in the early 1990s, these early cases did not receive the same type of media attention as the cases of 2002. Two journalists writing on sexual abuse and the Church note that in 1985 “there were thirty cases pending against the Church on behalf of one hundred victims. They were handled quietly – discreetly, some might say – by the courts and the news media.”<sup>98</sup>

In these early stages, journalists had to tread lightly. *The Times* of Acadiana, a weekly paper that reported on the Gauthé case, was the victim of an advertising boycott led by diocesan officials that cost the publishers more than \$20,000 in revenue.<sup>99</sup> *The Times* was also accused of practicing yellow journalism. In 1985, a religion reporter for

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<sup>98</sup> Bruni and Burkett, 34.

<sup>99</sup> Bruni and Burkett, 190.

the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* took the same aggressive route as *Globe* editor-in-chief Martin Baron did in 2002. She went to court to have documents unsealed for a story about a priest sex-abuse victim. She recalls receiving hate calls, angry letters, and even the disapproval of fellow reporters after the story ran. Tales like these were enough to inhibit some of the most daring reporters.

Early editorials avoided any explicit language about a cover-up, and instead gently prodded Church officials to take positive steps to alleviate the problem. On May 23, 1985, the *Times* ran an editorial on the Gauthé case:

The Acadiana community has also suffered under the veil of secrecy that surrounds the case of Gilbert Gauthé. Although Bishop Gerard Frey has issued several general pastoral statements about the case, no church authority has talked specifically about it with the media. It seems the legal exigencies of insurance companies outweigh the more visceral needs of a community to discuss the matter with full knowledge of the facts— to have a catharsis – and wipe the slate clean.<sup>100</sup>

This editorial is hardly scathing. Interestingly, the secular press would not ultimately be responsible for stepping up the coverage of priest sex abuse. *The National Catholic Reporter*, an independent newspaper owned by lay people that has covered the Church since 1964, took an aggressive approach. Consider the highly apparent difference in tone from the *Times*'s words in this 1985 editorial:

These are serious and damaging matters. But a related and broader scandal rests with local bishops. Frequently, local bishops exhibit little concern for the traumatic effects these molestation scandals have on the boys and their families – even though mental disturbances, and, in one recent case, suicide have followed such molestations. Only legal threats and law suits seem capable of provoking local bishops into taking firm actions against the priest.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Jason Berry, *Lead Us Not into Temptation: Catholic Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Priests* (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, IL: 1992) 106.

<sup>101</sup> Berry, 107.

Three years later, the *National Catholic Reporter* made a straightforward statement: “The U.S. Catholic bishops are presiding over a scandal.” The editorial concluded with highly prophetic remarks:

We are not talking here about cash settlements, but about justice in the church. Bishops may be seen to be condoning immorality in order to protect the institution. They will not succeed.<sup>102</sup>

The *National Catholic Reporter* was read by laymen, priests, bishops, cardinals, and even the Vatican. In short, Church officials had warning signs of trouble more than ten years before the scandal of 2002. The media were using the term “scandal” in 1988, a time when they held only anemic knowledge of the depth of the problem.

From 1982 to 1992, an estimated 400 priests were reported to Church officials or civil law enforcement for molesting boys. In 1992, the problem spiraled from a trickle of accusations to a steady flood. In that year, the Church’s financial losses reached \$400 million as a result of victim’s settlements, legal expenses, and treatment for clergy.<sup>103</sup> This was also the year when Massachusetts learned of the sexual abuse by Father James Porter.

WBZ-4 investigative reporter Joe Bergantino told the story of Porter on May 7, 1992 in an interview with eight of Porter’s victims. The airing prompted 48 additional victims to come forward within ten days – a figure that would reach 97 by September. Long before the Geoghan and Father Paul Shanley headlines, a Massachusetts scandal gained national attention. Two journalists note that during the summer of 1992, “no American who watched CNN or the ABC-TV news show ‘PrimeTime Live’ or read the *New York Times* had not met at least one survivor of childhood sexual abuse by a priest

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<sup>102</sup> Berry, 288.

<sup>103</sup> Berry, xxi.

or heard one nightmarish tale.”<sup>104</sup> On the local level, the same held true for the Boston news broadcasts and newspapers. It was the *Globe*’s coverage of Porter that prompted Law to stage his dramatic invocation of God’s power on the newspaper.

Considering these telling portents it is almost impossible to believe that Church officials could not predict the boiling point of 2002. As revealed in the first chapter, archdiocesan officials were aware of the *Globe*’s investigation four months before the first story appeared in January 2002. Spotlight Team editor Walter V. Robinson even extended the professional courtesy of a heads-up to Cardinal Law on that story, and a more-than-generous time period to formulate a response. Together, these facts disprove the popular belief that the archdiocese was unprepared or blind-sided.

It is more accurate to characterize the archdiocese as helplessly inept at media relations – at least when it came to crisis management. Cardinal O’Connell was known for staging dramatic Church events to ensure photo opportunities and headlines. His every appearance at commencements, lectures, and parades was considered newsworthy. The same aura of grandeur held for Richard Cushing, his immediate successor. Humberto Cardinal Medeiros was, in stark terms, relatively dull. He was not the type to stage a show for the delight of the faithful. Law better fit the expectations for the role of a Boston cardinal; his ordination was a grand media event, with some spectators comparing him to John F. Kennedy.

In 2002, the theologian Daniel Maguire wrote in *U.S. News & World Report*: “It is not often that we witness the death of a mystique.”<sup>105</sup> Although he was speaking in a more general sense, this statement perfectly fits the situation in Boston. The weaknesses

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<sup>104</sup> Bruni and Berkett, 33.

<sup>105</sup> David Gibson, *The Coming Catholic Church: How the Faithful are Shaping a New American Catholicism* (Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY: 2002) 33.

of the Catholic leadership were exposed, stripping the hierarchy of decades of cherished infallibility. This process did not transpire overnight; it began in 1992 with the Porter scandal.

The archdiocese hired Donna Morrissey at a time when it was looking for a young and dynamic personality to draw positive press for its charitable works, which it felt were either overlooked or ignored in the media. Morrissey came to Lake Street after working as a reporter at WBZ-4 in Boston and was able to fulfill the limited expectations for her job – mainly, attract good publicity. She had good contacts, but she lacked any special training in public relations, which she would need in the months to come.

John Dunn, Boston College spokesperson and a professor of public relations, commented on the Church response in 2002: “The archdiocesan handling of the scandal is exactly how *not* to do public relations.” Dunn provided an academic definition of public relations: “To articulate a position, give a logical defense, to answer charges and allegations. It’s the management of communications between an institution and the various publics upon which its successes depend.”<sup>106</sup> In every sense, the archdiocese failed to perform any of these tasks adequately.

Good public relations requires an institution to respond to questions and charges from external sources, but the Church was more than a government agency or corporation; inherent in Church culture is the idea that the archdiocese does not have to respond to anyone, that it should be impermeable to scrutiny.

The archdiocese could have answered the *Globe*’s questions in December 2001, or at least drafted statements for inclusion in the story. Instead, the archdiocese offered no response, and continued to mostly ignore the press throughout 2002. Some *Globe* critics

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<sup>106</sup> John Dunn, personal interview, 20 Feb. 2004.

point to its allegedly unbalanced coverage as ammunition. From a journalistic standpoint, this assessment is groundless. It is true that the majority of stories included quotes from incriminating Church documents, victims, victims' attorneys, and lay reactions – but no archdiocesan response. Instead, these stories included a line such as “Morrissey declined to comment” or “Morrissey did not return phone calls yesterday.” The *Globe* consistently made the attempt to get an archdiocesan reaction to events, which is reflected in every story without Church comment. The archdiocese either did not comment at all, or the response came 24 to 72 hours after the news had already been absorbed by the public.

On January 10, 2002 – four days after the first *Globe* story – Law held a press conference in which he said he was “profoundly sorry.” The hour-long conference was televised by New England Cable News and in part by WBZ-4. If the archdiocese assumed that a public apology would alleviate the problem, the next few months would prove them quite wrong. But already, the archdiocese was on the defensive. When asked whether he would end efforts to bar public access to court documents in sex abuse cases, Law said, “I need to discuss the implications of that question further.” This response was very telling of the highly protective state of the archdiocese, yet Law remained cool and collected during the press conference. The *Globe* described his demeanor:

Law was not only profusely apologetic, but was uncharacteristically nondefensive, fielding many more questions than typical for him and not once responding in anger. Instead, he spoke sympathetically of people who might second-guess him, write critical stories in the news media, or even sue him.”<sup>107</sup>

Four days later, Law would announce that priest sex abuse was a matter of “open and public discussion.” His actions in the days and months following would challenge the sincerity of this statement.

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<sup>107</sup> Michael Paulson, “Actions follow an established course,” *The Boston Globe*, 10 Jan. 2002: A1.

The first batch of Church documents was released on January 23, 2002, and the *Globe* had numerous stories ready for the next day's paper. Judge Constance Sweeney had set the release date at January 26 weeks in advance, but the attorneys and media got a three-day head start. The archdiocese knew this day was approaching, but still they seemed somehow unprepared to talk with reporters. The *Globe* noted that Morrissey "did not return telephone calls from the *Globe* yesterday seeking comment on the documents."

On the same day as the release, Law held a closed-door meeting with priests to speak about the sex abuse crisis. No reporters were allowed. This tense period marked a turning point in the Church's relations with the *Globe* and other Boston media. Law's first conference was a quick response, and it seemed promising of his handling of the crisis with the public. But by the end of January, Law began to avoid the press all together, sometimes going to extreme lengths to hide from reporters and cameras.

After the priests meeting, the *Globe* noted that "the Cardinal would not speak to the news media yesterday. But the archdiocese arranged for two priests loyal to Law to brief reporters." Reporters, certainly, were hoping for a full or partial transcript of the meeting. The article further said that "at 9:30 p.m. last night, about seven hours after the cardinal spoke and several hours after the evening television newscasts, the archdiocese released seven sentences from Law's remarks."<sup>108</sup> This delayed response time is inappropriate for any press office hoping for cooperative relations with the media. PR people should work with the news cycle, not against it. It seemed as though the archdiocese was inviting antagonism.

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<sup>108</sup> The Spotlight Team, "Scores of priests involved in sex abuse cases," *The Boston Globe*, 31 Jan. 2002: A1.

Earlier that week, Law had held his second press conference at the Park Plaza Hotel in Boston. A *Globe* article on January 25 described the scene:

Media coverage of the event was tightly controlled. The archdiocese refused to allow reporters to attend any part of the event, and security officers assisting the archdiocese prevented photographers from taking pictures of priests inside the hotel, and then physically barred a *Globe* photographer from taking a picture of Law talking on a sidewalk with a man who said he is a victim of clergy sexual abuse.<sup>109</sup>

The Church's reaction to its heightened notoriety in the media was to do everything possible to make a reporter's job more difficult. There was a deliberate attempt to ignore the press and work against them – which worked only to the disadvantage of the Church. Communication is key for any institution during a crisis, but the Church tried to control the news in an unrealistic way. It held press conferences to provide information on its own terms, while at the same time refusing to answer questions from reporters.

Even the archdiocese's attorneys appeared unwilling to talk to reporters, let alone extend them minor courtesies. On January 28, the *Globe* mentioned that “[Wilson] Rogers did not return a telephone call yesterday. Reached at his home last night, Rogers's son and law partner, Wilson Rogers III, hung up on a *Globe* reporter.” This is how people get burned by the press: if they hang up on a reporter, it will be included in the story. If they avoid reporters by other means, they will probably be mentioned as well, such as this example from March 2: “Rogers and his legal team ... left by a side door and down a stairwell, avoiding reporters.” Good reporters are always watching; that's what they do best.

Over the next few months, Law's dodging of the media made the news stories as well. During a visit to the Vatican in Rome to discuss the scandal, he was notably absent

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<sup>109</sup> Michael Paulson, “Diocese will report ex-priests,” *The Boston Globe*, 25 Jan. 2002: A1.



at the press conference that followed. Back in Boston on May 9, the *Globe* ran a story about Law's behavior that was headlined, "At court, cardinal avoids the crowd":

Law was the invisible man around the courthouse yesterday. Everybody was talking about him, but almost no one had seen him ... Although Law stayed in the courthouse for six hours, he had almost no contact with anyone other than lawyers and the court officers in Courtroom 4. He entered the courthouse the same way judges and jailed criminal defendants do: through the parking garage.

Then he took a back elevator to the 12th floor and walked down a short, closed-off hallway and into the courtroom. The two members of the news media allowed brief access – a pool of photographer and camera man – weren't allowed to ask questions.<sup>110</sup>

Law resorted to less direct methods to avoid the media. In the first weeks of 2002, he held official two press conferences, on January 10 and 24. He did not speak to the media again until June 14, when he granted five-minute, one-on-one interviews to five Boston television affiliates, the *Boston Herald*, and the *Globe*. After another lapse, Law held a third press conference on October 19, 2002.

The archdiocese hired a public relations firm in late February to improve communications and help the overworked Morrissey. Two weeks later, Law chose the Reverend Christopher J. Coyne to represent the archdiocese in television interviews, though his role would significantly expand and eventually eclipse that of Morrissey.

Morrissey herself was handicapped by Church lawyers and the hierarchy. On one end, the attorneys handcuffed her ability to respond quickly because they had to review her statements. Dunn characterized this type of statement PR as "inherently limited" because "there is no opportunity to respond instantaneously. You need flexibility, and the chance to go on and off the record with reporters as necessary."<sup>111</sup> At the other end, Morrissey struggled because she did not wear a Roman collar. She was on a need-to-

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<sup>110</sup> Kathleen Burge, "At court, cardinal avoids the crowd," *The Boston Globe*, 9 May 2002: A32.

<sup>111</sup> John Dunn, personal interview, 20 February 2004.

know basis to such an extent that when Law went to Rome in April, she herself found out he was there from *Globe* reporters asking for comment.

Anthropologist Gregory Bateson wrote, “The myth of power is, of course, a very powerful myth and probably most people in this world more or less believe in it. It is a myth which, if everyone believes it, becomes self-validating.”<sup>112</sup> The powerful Catholic Church in Boston dedicated almost four decades to self-preservation in the face of serious accusations. When this image began to crumble in early 2002, the archdiocese attempted to shield itself from the media in the hopes of avoiding further scrutiny, which had the opposite effect. The Church’s powerful position was challenged and it went on the defensive. Its tactics included tainting the media as anti-Catholic, or suggesting that the coverage was misleading or unfair. As Robinson puts it, “[Law’s] contempt for the *Globe* knew no bounds. A lot of it had to do with his own ego.”

In response to questions from reporters on February 3, 2002 Law said, “There is no priest, or former priest, working in this archdiocese, in any assignment whom we know to have been responsible for sexual abuse. *I hope you get that straight.*” The implication is that the reporters present were unnecessarily prodding, and that their stories would misconstrue Law’s statement or twist his words. Notably, he was lying to the reporters.

Considering the history of anti-Catholicism provided in this work, which was traced primarily through the media, this fear and mistrust by the Catholic hierarchy has roots— albeit very old and outdated ones. During the sex-abuse crisis, this aversion to straightforwardness crippled the Church’s ability to respond in a reasonable manner consistent with standards in public communication. The Catholic Church – in this case,

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<sup>112</sup> Bruni and Burkett, 179.

the Boston archdiocese – suffers from mediaphobia, a malady with serious consequence for an institution in the public arena.

## Conclusion

Phillip Jenkins reasons that anti-Catholicism survives today because it is “endlessly useful.”<sup>113</sup> Historically speaking, this argument seems perfectly legitimate. Colonial Americans sincerely hated their Canadian neighbors, or perhaps the British exploited the Catholicism of the French to protect their colonies to the south. The Boston Nativists were motivated to hatred by the growing number of Catholic immigrants to their city, or perhaps by the fear that the newcomers would threaten their job security and social status. The Democrat Al Smith may have lost the 1928 presidential election because he was a Catholic, or perhaps because politicians and voters alike were apprehensive of his tough record as a New York political boss. The American media rigorously covered the priest sex-abuse scandal because the Church maintains an essentially un-liberal social agenda, or because Church officials collaborated in a cover-up over several decades to protect criminal priests at the expense of innocent children.

In the late 20th century, anti-Catholic accusations have been widely aired. To use Jenkins’s phrase, the accusation is “endlessly useful.” Today, it takes little more than a news column that criticizes Church officials or decries the sex abuse by priests to raise questions about the influence of prejudice. It used to be that people had to work hard for this title, either through banning priests, burning convents, or organizing an entire movement, such as the APA or the KKK.

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<sup>113</sup> Phillip Jenkins, “The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice,” The Church in the 21st Century Initiative, Devlin 008, Boston College, 22 March 2004.

Jenkins writes that “in the media, Catholicism is regarded as a perfectly legitimate target,”<sup>114</sup> but he is joined by scholars, theologians, priests, and lay people who targeted the media in their own attacks. In Boston, the *Globe* has been unfairly and inaccurately tainted as an anti-Catholic newspaper. And even though Jenkins offers some praise for its coverage, the basis for his entire book amounts to a criticism of ethics in modern journalism.

A common complaint about the coverage is that it has exaggerated the number of accused priests, making everyone wearing a Roman collar feel the sting of suspicious eyes. Likewise, generalizations that sweep every newspaper, magazine, radio and television news broadcast under the umbrella of “anti-Catholic media” attribute guilt to all. This negative association contributed to the contamination of the *Globe*’s reputation among many Catholics. To accuse a reporter or institution of anti-Catholicism is to call them prejudiced; the charge should not be so casual.

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<sup>114</sup> Jenkins, 4.